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The Society was formed in 1946 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website www.rnbws.org.uk or by application to the Secretary.

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Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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Chairman's Foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

Once again I am pleased to introduce a splendid issue of *Sea Swallow* and update members on what has been happening in the Society over the past year.

Our field work has included a further trip to Madeira and a significant contribution to the RAF Ornithological Society's (RAFOS) expedition in support of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's national seabird census. I certainly commend RAFOS for their substantial effort in undertaking this valuable work. The whole programme is well described by their leader Keith Cowieson in his article on the Orkney expedition of 2018, and this year's RNBWS contribution in Shetland is covered later in the issue by Stephen Chapman.

In Madeira, Steve Copsey, Mark Cutts and Lee Lappin made a further visit to help Frank Zino with ringing and monitoring Zino's Petrels during their summer return to the island. Those who have followed the reports from past issues of *Sea Swallow* will know that weather — and wind in particular — can hamper the work, and this year it was worse than ever. So after four nights going up the mountain, the team failed to net a single bird. However Frank and his wife were more successful in better conditions in the following nights. Despite this disappointing season, the Society remains committed to this conservation programme for one of our rarest seabirds and we will be looking for volunteers to help again next summer.

In other news, the AGM and Executive Committee meetings in March were held in Lincolnshire and combined with some excellent East coast birding. Thanks to the good planning by Philip Boak, we were able to stay at RAF Cranwell and enjoy something different from our normal habitat. Next year we will return to the South Coast so look out for announcements in *Mollymawk*.

Turning to this *Sea Swallow*, you will find a pleasing variety of articles across the range of our interests. All the world's oceans are covered, with particular focus on Southern waters. As well as being a good read, many of these also represent the finishing touch to a set of records submitted to our database. Perhaps I might single out Simon Cook in this regard as a regular and welcome contributor and a meticulous observer, recorder and submitter. Amongst more general accounts, I am pleased that Chris Moorey took the time to write his interesting piece about Turkey and I particularly enjoyed David Morgan's article. Describing his return to the Falkland Islands, many years after he served there as a Sea Harrier pilot during the 1982 conflict, his is an evocative account of the wildlife which will resonate with many members, and his description of visiting battlefield sites with his Argentinian adversaries is rather moving.

And finally, whilst I'm not really a book reviewer, I must share the pleasure I have had from reading Adam Nicholson's book, *The Seabird's Cry*. I am sure that many members will have already read it but those who haven't should seek it out. For me, it has exactly the right balance of science, observation and just a little folklore to make for a compelling read.

Martin Alabaster
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Marine to marine ornithologist, Nelson's Island Seabird Research Expedition 2018

by Major Peter Carr, Royal Marines

Nelson's was the first island I landed on in 2008 during my Executive Officer's familiarisation patrol of the northern atolls of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), also known as the Chagos Archipelago. As remote as can be in the central Indian Ocean it has never been inhabited by man. Crucially for breeding seabirds, it has also remained free of invasive predators such as rats. On landing, having never experienced an oceanic island in near-pristine condition up until that moment, I was awestruck by the sights, sounds and smells of thousands of breeding seabirds.

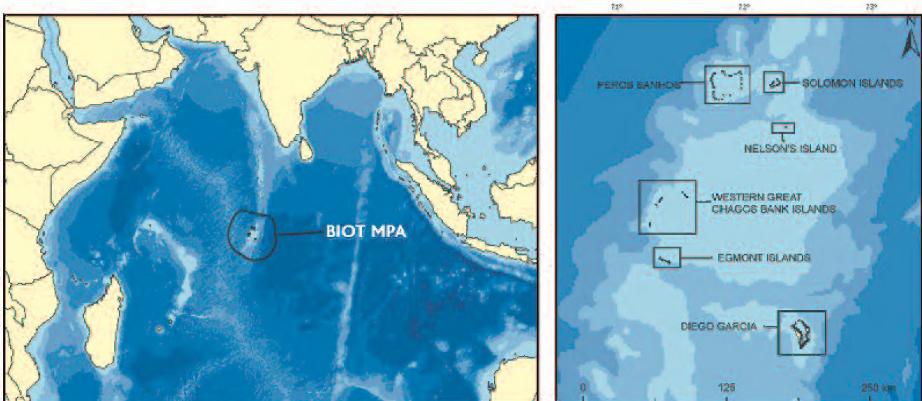


Figure 1. Nelson's Island in the British Indian Ocean Territory (Chagos Archipelago)

Ten years on, by which time the British Government had declared virtually all of this UK Overseas Territory as the Chagos Marine Protected Area (at the time the largest no-take MPA in the world), I had retired from the Royal Marines and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) was mounting a seabird research expedition to Nelson's Island as part of the Bertarelli Programme of Marine Science. As a full time PhD student with ZSL/Exeter University I was to be part of the three person team investigating the year round biology and foraging ecology of two species of seabirds, Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* and Brown Booby *S. leucogaster* breeding on Nelson, and how these relate to the effectiveness of the MPA for seabirds.

To research the foraging patterns 40 Red-footed and six Brown Boobies were captured and ringed with uniquely numbered BTO metal rings and then fitted with tail-mounted GPS loggers (15g, iGotU GT-120, Mobile Action Technology Inc) and leg-mounted geolocators (3.0g, Intigeo C330, Migrate Technology).

These tags were deployed on nesting boobies for three to eight days and have to be recovered to download the data they have gathered. Thirty-eight of the Red-footed and all six of the Brown Boobies were recaptured - a very high recovery rate.

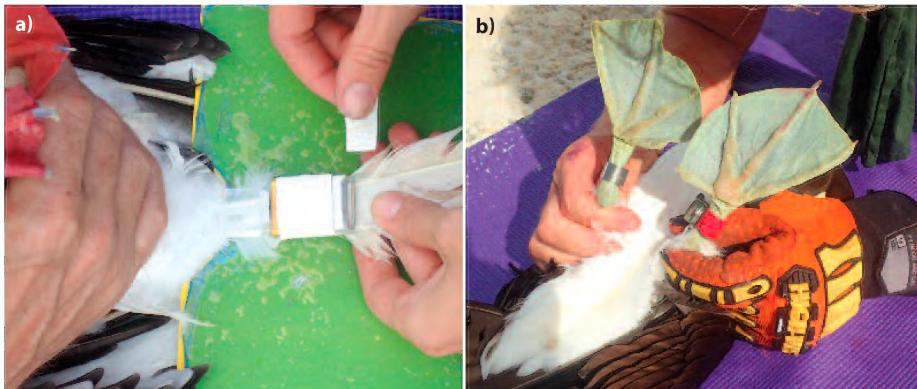


Plate 1 a. IGotU GPS tag. © P Carr b. Intigeo GLS tag and BTO ring. © P Carr

Preliminary mapping of the GPS tracks indicated that all of the Red-footed Boobies when rearing small chicks and the Brown Boobies when incubating eggs forage entirely within the MPA. They also have shown that, as expected, the more pelagic Red-footed makes lengthier foraging trips than the larger Brown Booby (see Fig 2).

Data sets similar to those acquired on Nelson's Island in July 2018 had been gathered from the second largest Red-footed Booby breeding colony in the Indian Ocean, on Diego Garcia, in June/July 2016 and June 2018 (SE monsoon season) and in December 2016 and January 2018 (NW monsoon season). These form the core of my PhD thesis. However, science is not the focus of this short article and I would like to return to Nelson's Island to close with a few abiding memories.

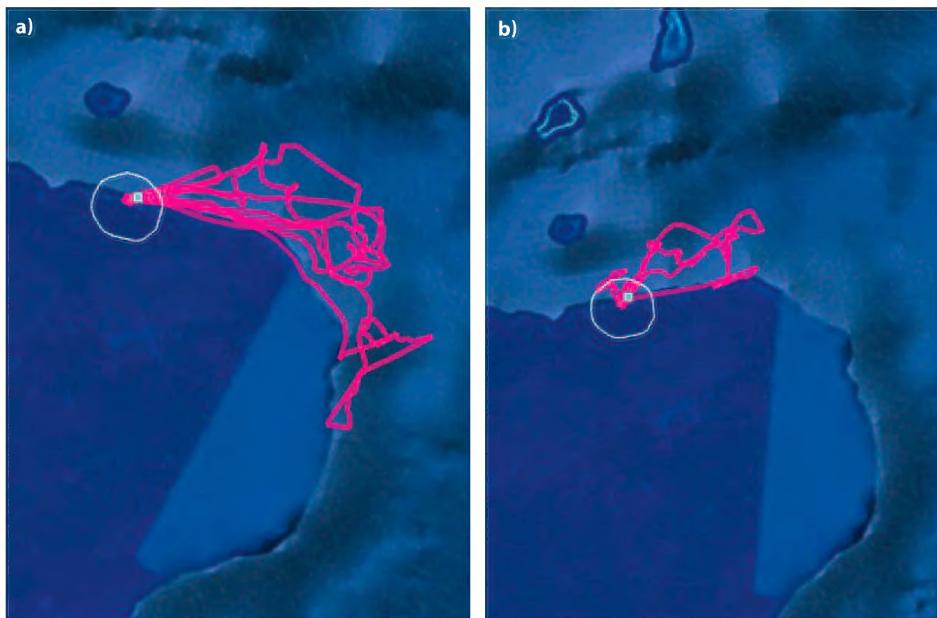


Figure 2. The tracks of a foraging, breeding Red-footed Booby (a) and Brown Booby (b) from Nelson's Island. White boundaries represent Important Bird Areas. © Google Earth



Plate 2. Displaying Wedge-tailed Shearwaters on Nelson's Island. © H Wood

Prior to the expedition Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *Ardenna pacifica* were thought to be breeding on Nelson's Island in very small numbers (1–10 pairs). Our time on the island revealed that something approaching 1,000 birds were returning to the island nightly. Birds were displaying and calling at dusk and dawn and it is presumed that this will lead to a full breeding episode throughout their known breeding period in BIOT, October to March. This is a significant new breeding colony for the central Indian Ocean if the displaying leads to breeding – and there is little reason to suspect this will not happen. But it is not just the number of birds that is memorable. My strongest memory of these extraordinary creatures will be their exodus from the island at dawn through our campsite, bumping in to chairs, camp-beds and storage barrels as they scurried towards the beach and the security of flight over the open ocean.

Throughout their ranges Great *Fregata minor* and Lesser *F. ariel* Frigatebirds are kleptoparasites to some degree. In BIOT I have seen food stealing by both frigatebird species and the main species I witnessed being robbed were Red-footed Booby and Common *Anous stolidus* and Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris*. We estimated that more than 20,000 birds were roosting overnight on the island, mostly of these three frigatebird target species. The evening spectacle of frigatebirds soaring over the island waiting for full-cropped birds to return should not have been as exciting as we all found it. Watching squadrons of adult boobies coming back incredibly high in the sky and then dropping like parachutists on to the island to avoid the frigatebirds was a joy. Not so the juvenile boobies which had been out at sea on training missions, learning how to fish. These inexperienced birds returned low over the water and often would find themselves the quarry of a group of pirates. Much better than television!

The most abiding memory I will keep with me is the sensory experience of being on an oceanic island where seabirds are undisturbed. Free from habitat destruction and invasive predators that have devastated so many other oceanic island seabird colonies, on Nelson's Island one's senses are overloaded, especially at dusk. The smell of musk oil emanating from shearwater burrows is near-addictive. The returning-partner-to-the-nest braying call of Red-footed Booby mixed with the eerie 'baby



Plates 3–4. Incubating Brown Booby and breeding Red-footed Booby on Nelson's Island. © both P Carr

‘crying’ courtship calls of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and the occasional Tolkienian Nazgûl screaming of overhead Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni* was otherworldly. And the sights: the billowing wisps of Lesser Noddy as they took a final flight for the night, the shearing of the water of hundreds of Wedge-tails as they wait for darkness to fall before heading to land and of course, the lines of Red-footed Booby making their way back to this still safe haven in the central Indian Ocean. It all made me think that the decade between visits had been a long and interesting journey, from Marine to marine ornithologist.



Plate 5. The Nelson's Island expedition team waiting for the nightly spectacle of thousands of seabirds returning to the island to roost. © M Nicoll

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the Bertarelli Foundation as part of the Bertarelli Programme in Marine Science. It would not have been possible without the full support of the BIOT Administration and, on Diego Garcia, particularly Major Renny Bulmer RM, the Executive Officer at the time of the visit. Thanks too to the Captain and crew of the BIOT Patrol Vessel *Grampian Frontier* who provided excellent professional service in transporting us to Nelson's Island, and to British Forces BIOT personnel for their assistance with the recovery. Final thanks are warmly extended to my supervisor Dr Malcolm Nicoll (Batty) and BPMS colleague Hannah Wood (Meerkat) for allowing me the pleasure and privilege of their company on Nelson's Island in July 2018.

Peter Carr

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Plate 6. The 'Simmer Dim'.¹ © JN Wells

Simmer dim 1: RAFOS seabird census, Orkney, June 2018 - a citizen scientist's perspective

by Group Captain Keith Cowieson,
RAFOS Field Activities Liaison Officer

(All photographs by the author except where indicated)

Every 15 years or so, I start to hanker after a week's seabird surveying on one of Scotland's magnificent northern or western Isles. Thoughts stray to the delights of dangling over the edge of some dizzying precipice counting auks, shags and kittiwakes on narrow ledges, crawling around on all fours sniffing peat hags or drystone dykes for the tell-tale musty smell of nesting petrels or steeling oneself to walk briskly, yet carefully, through a ternery, gullery or skua colony counting nests, eggs and chicks as the local inhabitants attempt to terrorise intruders into retreat through dive bombing, showering with guano or playing chicken with you during intimidating, low-level, head-on attacks.

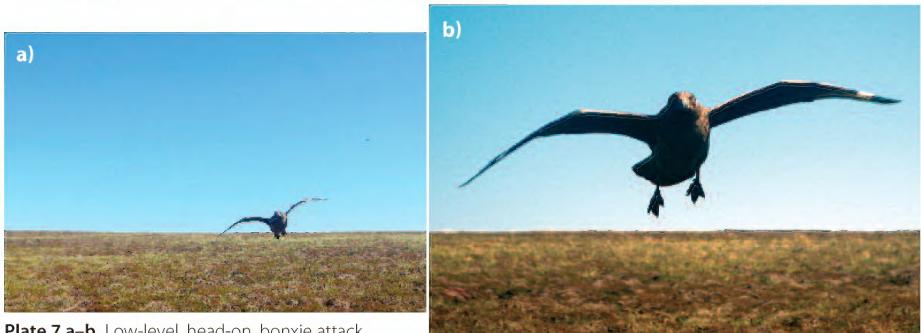


Plate 7 a-b. Low-level, head-on, bonxie attack.

¹ Orkney's latitude at 59 degrees north means the sun is above the horizon for 18 hours in mid-summer. It rises at around 04:00 hrs and sets at about 10:30 hrs. But it is still twilight for much of the night as the sun only dips just below the horizon. This period of not-quite darkness is known in Orkney as the 'simmer dim'.

It was therefore with a sense of joy, after a couple of years of champing at the bit as funding for the seabird census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland was finalised, that I espied Daisy Burnell, the overall JNCC Seabirds Count coordinator, at the Scottish Ornithologists' Club's winter conference. Daisy was actively recruiting volunteers for this, the fourth Periodic Seabirds Census, and a quick 15-minute chat later we were on, with Daisy promising to allocate RAFOS some under-recorded Scottish islands or stretches of mainland coastline to survey. Next, following discussions with Daisy, Drs Liz Humphries and Niall Burton of the BTO and Kate Thompson of SNH, we were allocated the Northern Orkney Islands of Eday and Stronsay. Previous RAFOS seabird census forays had been to Mingulay and Berneray in 1979, Mingulay again in 1985 for the Seabird Colony Register, the Flannans in 1998 and Benbecula, North & South Uist for Seabird 2000, so Orkney would represent exciting new ground for us. Ringing round some of the RAFOS old guard revealed that despite a distinct greying and general diminution of hair, expansion of girth and stiffening of various joints over the years, most were up for it and raring to go.

So it was with a sense of keen expectation that our two parties, each of six enthusiastic citizen scientists, disembarked on a glorious evening in mid-June at the jetties on Eday and Stronsay, having had our first taste of things to come watching local Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* and Great Skua *S. skua* (scootie-allan and bonxie in Orcadian parlance), Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* (or pickiaterno) and Guillemot *Uria aalge*, Razorbills *Alca torda*, Puffin *Fratercula arctica* and Black Guillemot *Cephus grille* (aak, baukie, tammie norrie and tystie) from the decks of Orkney Ferries' inter-island services. Our task was to survey all 103 Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) main island sites on Eday and Stronsay, and as many of the outlying smaller islets as time and resources permitted. This account is focused on Eday and its outliers, where I was to spend the following week.

Seabirds Count Priorities. During pre-expedition planning, it was stressed that the priorities for Seabirds Count should be on skua, tern and gull colonies, as some of these species were those giving rise to the greatest conservation concern. For example, the State of the UK's Birds (SUKB) 2017 (JNCC 2018) states that kleptoparasitic Arctic skua numbers have declined by a whopping 76% since 1986, and 64% since Seabird 2000 - the greatest decline of any UK breeding seabird over the period. Conversely, Great Skua numbers have continued their seemingly inexorable progress with a 53% increase in



Plate 8. Recently hatched Bonxie chick, still with egg-tooth.

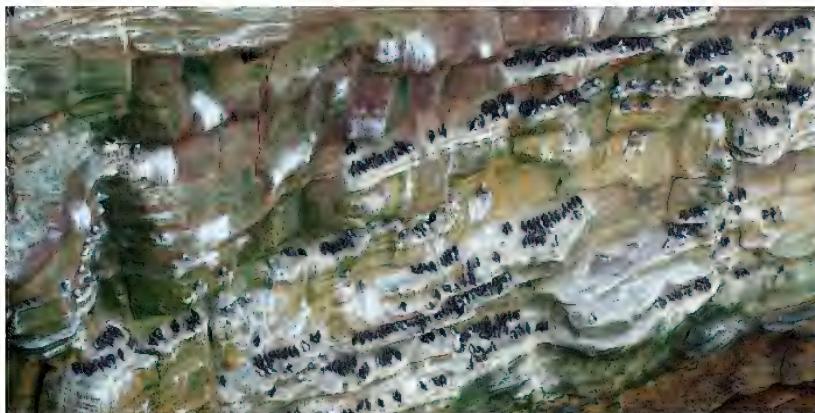


Plate 9. Calf of Eday mixed seabird colony.

numbers since 1986 and 18% since Seabird 2000 (JNCC 2018). Reviewing the Seabird 2000 results for Eday on the SMP website revealed that Arctic Skua had been three times as numerous as Great Skua 18 years ago, so it was interesting to speculate what we might find. Similarly, SUKB 2017 held that Arctic Tern numbers had steadily increased over the period 1986–2017 by an average of 18% - albeit mainly in England - yet anecdotal evidence in recent years recorded widespread breeding failure of some tern colonies in UK's northern isles. Again, we looked forward to discovering the level of change, if any, between Seabird 2000 observations and our own.

Observations. So, what did we observe during our survey and what tentative conclusions were we able to draw? The task on Eday was simple: walk the entire coastline and visit all 43 seabird colonies counted during Seabird 2000 and conduct a snap-shot, single visit survey, with repeat visits to particularly large, difficult-to-survey colonies if time permitted. Our observations are tabulated below, alongside Seabird 2000 results:

Table 1. Changes in seabird populations on Eday (inc Faray and Calf of Eday), 2000–2018.²

Species	Seabird 2000	Seabirds Count 2018	% Change
Northern Fulmar	7533 AOS*	3099 AOS	-59
Great Cormorant	138 AON**	187 AON	+36
European Shag	56 AON	52 AON	-1
Arctic Skua	76 AOT	58 AOT	-24
Great Skua	26 AOT	104 AOT	+300
Black-legged Kittiwake	779 AON	148 AON	-81
Great Black-backed Gull	1520 ind	41 ind / 74 AON-AOT	N/A ³
Lesser Black-backed Gull	38 ind	1 ind / 49 AON-AOT	N/A
Herring Gull	70 ind	40 ind / 42 AON-AOT	N/A
Common Gull	512 ind	83 ind / 217 AON-AOT	N/A
Black-headed Gull	20 ind	11 ind / 2 AOT	N/A
Arctic Tern	727 ind	161 ind / 62 AON	-78 (ind)
Common Guillemot	2610 ind	5524 ind	+112
Razorbill	100 ind	101 ind	+1
Black Guillemot	349 ind	100 ind	N/A ⁴
Atlantic Puffin	0 ind	48 ind	-

*Apparently occupied site ** Apparently occupied nest ² Health warning – 2018 figures not yet checked

³ Different emphasis in gull census unit methodology employed in Seabird 2000 & Seabirds Census

⁴ Suboptimal timing period for 2018 counts.

Source: Seabird Monitoring Programme On-line Database <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/smp/Default.aspx>

While clearly only representing a specific, small island, snap-shot sample, the declines in Eday's Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* and Red-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* populations at -59% and -81% respectively, are almost double the overall SUKB trends (-31% and -44%). Meanwhile the 78% decline in Arctic Tern numbers is not consistent with the positive overall SUKB increase. Trends in gull populations are harder to discern as it seems that a different recording methodology was employed by the surveyors in Seabird 2000, with less emphasis on nest/territory recording. On auks, the positive trend for Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* at +112% was very encouraging, although very few young or eggs were spotted on the nesting ledges.

Skua observations. On Eday and the outliers that we were able to visit (Calf of Eday and Faray), our skua observations mirrored the SUKB trends, if not the scale of the reported national Arctic Skua decline. Arctic skua numbers were down 24% from 76 to 58 Apparently Occupied Territories (AOT) while Great Skua numbers had increased by 300% from 26 to 104 AOTs.

It was also apparent that where Great Skua colonies were most dense, Arctic Skua were least common, and generally located on the fringes of the bonxie colonies, often in boggier, lower-lying wet terrain than that favoured by their larger cousins. Although no predation by Great Skua of Arctic Skua eggs or chicks was observed on Eday, the 'bottom-up' pressure of decreasing numbers of some victim species (kittiwake & terns) coupled with the burgeoning population of competing/predatory great skua does conform to the broad thrust that the 'combined bottom-up / top-down pressures' have led to catastrophic Arctic skua declines in Scotland - as detailed in a recent Journal of Animal Ecology paper (Perkins *et al.*, 2018).



Plate 10. Dark phase Arctic Skua and (inset) Arctic Skua chick still with egg-tooth.

The catastrophic decline of the Arctic Skua populations in Scotland also raises the age-old conservationists' dilemma of whether to intervene or not. Perkins *et al.* explore a range of direct intervention solutions, such as supplementary feeding of Arctic Skua and Great Skua management at certain colonies with low host/victim numbers and high bonxie density. Such considerations have of course to be seen in the context of the global picture where Scotland's Arctic Skua population represents only 1% of the world's widespread and abundant Arctic Skua numbers, while the Scottish Great Skua population represents 57% of world Great Skua numbers (Perkins *et al.*, 2018). Finally, it is worth noting that globally, both species are categorised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as of 'Least Concern' (BirdLife International, 2018).

Non-native species. Meanwhile, ground-nesting seabirds (and all other ground-nesting species) benefit tremendously from the lack of mammalian predators on UK's northern and western islands. Indeed this is one of the reasons why these outlying islands are so vital for the internationally and nationally important populations of seabirds, waders and some ground-nesting birds-of-prey that they hold, and why major efforts are being made by national authorities and NGOs to clear islands of destructive, non-native species that have established themselves in the region - black and brown rats, American mink, hedgehogs and most recently on Orkney, stoats (SNH 2017a). So it was with a sense of dismay that we spotted a European Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* trundling along one of the roads on Eday, not far from both a small moorland Arctic Tern colony and a large mixed gullery. The hedgehog is a non-native species in the Orkneys and has wrought significant damage to the internationally important populations of wading birds (and others) on the Hebridean islands of North & South Uist and Benbecula since their unfortunate introduction there in the mid-1970s (SNH 2017b). On reporting our sighting to the authorities, it was surprising to learn that there was no hedgehog removal programme in place, unlike the Hebrides where significant efforts are underway to protect vulnerable ground-nesting species (SNH 2017b). The last thing some of our vulnerable ground-nesting seabird populations need is another pressure added to those already combining to depress populations - climate change-related factors, over and under-fishing and their effect on prey availability, off-shore wind farms, disturbance, land-use changes etc. It will be interesting to see what actions the authorities eventually contemplate, if any. For example, an extensive stoat trapping programme has been rolled out on some Orkney isles to counter that particular threat (SNH 2017a).



Plate 11. Predated tern.



Plate 12. 'Skua transect' surveyors on typical peatland terrain.

Some Lessons Identified. A spell of concentrated surveying effort always helps identify useful lessons for the next time round. Most of these lessons are not new, but nevertheless bear repeating. The question of how best to survey terns, gulls and skuas, whether to walk transects or to view from suitable vantage points, is addressed in the 'Seabird monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland' (Walsh *et al.*, 1995) and was discussed in detail with Liz Humphries and Niall Burton as part of our pre-expedition planning considerations. Our experience leant heavily towards transect walking. Even on the relatively flat, gently undulating moorland of Eday, many skua territories would have been missed if we had not slogged to and fro across the peatlands. Much 'dead ground' - ground hidden from an observer due to undulations in the land - existed on the island, including significant areas of historical peat diggings, meaning

that large tracts of suitable terrain and habitat could not be satisfactorily surveyed from SMP-defined vantage points. It was surprising how many hitherto hidden birds and territories were revealed during walked transects using what were essentially old-fashioned 'flush count' techniques (Bibby *et al.*, 1992) over areas that appeared devoid of birds when scanning from vantage points.

One other good giveaway for locating Great Skua (and Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*) territories and nest sites were the vivid patches of well-manured, green plots in the otherwise uniform brown peat and heathland-dominated landscape. These invariably indicated historical breeding sites and lookout posts, well-fertilised by guano and the decomposing corpses of prey over the years, and sometimes with previous seasons' nest bowls clearly visible, close to the current nest.

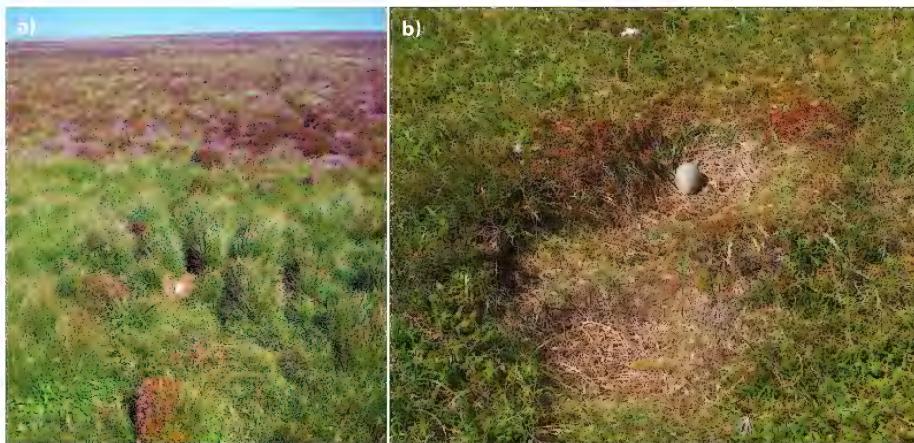


Plate 13 a–b. Great Skua nest and egg in signature, well-manured 'green plot' on coastal heath. Current and previous year's Great Skua nest bowls side by side.

Disturbance. Disturbance to nesting seabirds is a well-known hazard and one that surveyors must always strive to minimise. It was instructive therefore to note just how sensitive and vulnerable to disturbance a Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colony on our patch was. This particular colony is on the Calf of Eday, a little-visited site according to the local boatman. The usual landing point for the island is directly onto a convenient shelf of rock, some 2–300m from the moorland edge-based colony. On the day of our visit, a sea-haar⁵ was just lifting, limiting visibility to around 2–300m. It became apparent that as we approached the landing site by small boat, several of the closest cormorants were flying off their nests into the adjacent water below. This served as a timely reminder for us to 'box' around the colony once ashore, giving it a wide 150m berth before we started transect walking outbound and when returning later to re-embark. The colony itself was ringed by 3–4 pairs of nesting Great Black-backed Gulls, ideal for 'convenience' foraging when the cormorant nests and young were left unattended, as the rather pathetic remains of indigestible cormorant flippers by the gull nesting areas reminded us. In our subsequent in-house debrief, the utility of using drones for surveying such colonies of easily-disturbed seabirds was discussed, but they are not without their own issues and may increase the risks of disturbance in untrained hands (SNH, 2018b).

⁵ In meteorology, sea haar or sea fret is a cold sea fog. It occurs most often on the east coast of England or Scotland between April and September, when warm air passes over the cold North Sea.

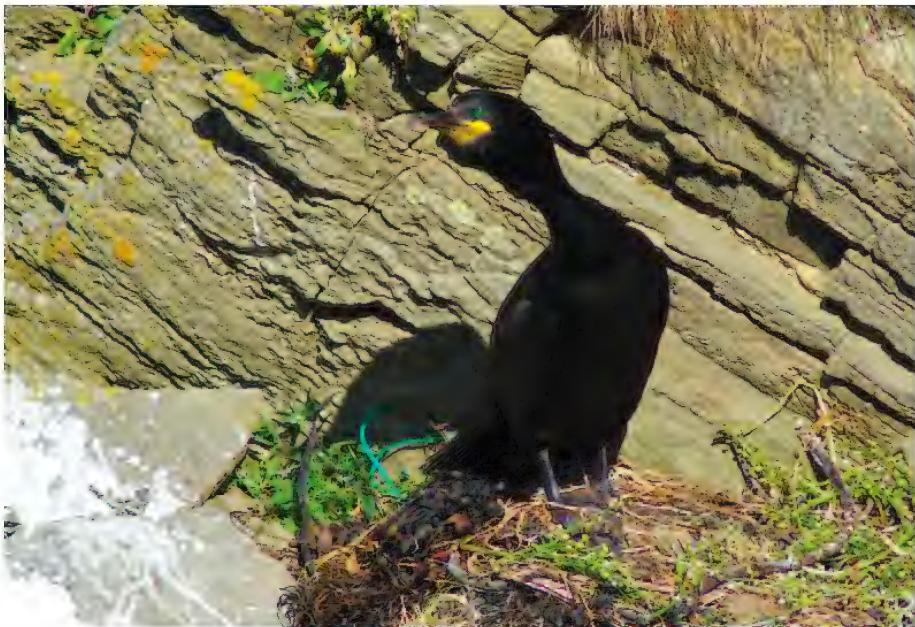


Plate 14. Shag 'trace' nest incorporating plastic.

Seabird Nest Incorporation of Plastic. Dr Nina O'Hanlon of the University of the Highlands and Islands had requested that surveyors note any seabird nest incorporation of plastic during their work, in order that the proportion of nests affected could be ascertained. Although small amounts of plastic litter were apparent on Eday's beaches, only two nests were definitely identified with plastic incorporated, that of a shag, on the western coast of the outlying island of Faray and an old Raven/Crow's nest that a Fulmar had expropriated on the Calf of Eday. The Shag's nest was one of a small colony of 15.

Non-target bird species. Eday's appeal was not limited to seabirds, for we saw over forty species of land bird; all in all a fantastic assemblage of birds for an island only 14 x 4 kms and 2,745 Ha in extent.



Plate 15. Short-eared Owl.

Overall, 103 SMP main island sites, two outlying island sites and two new main island sites were surveyed by RAFOS personnel on Eday and Stronsay ie 107 of Orkney's 1,200 seabird breeding sites. The sites ranged in character from 250ft vertical cliffs, through heather moorland and peat bog to glorious stretches of sandy beaches. Personnel covered between 5–12 miles on foot, daily, often over demanding and unforgiving terrain and in all weathers. In addition, the teams completed 15 species lists for BTO's BirdTrack at the 10 km square level. A total of 589 BirdTrack records were created in the survey area with 74 species recorded. Meanwhile, one British Birds Rarities Committee Rarity Submission was raised, many individual nest and colony nest record cards covering 25 species are in the process of being generated for the BTO Nest Record Scheme, 14 individual birds from five species were ringed on Stronsay, two Nest Incorporation of Plastic Monitoring Forms were generated, a non-native hedgehog sighting on Eday was forwarded to SNH and the Orkney Mammals Recorder and three Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, Flower Insect Timed (FIT) count records were submitted to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology FIT database - including that of a Great Yellow Bumblebee *Bombus distinguendus*, one of Britain's rarest.

Finally, the RAFOS Chairman and Committee would like to express their sincere gratitude to The Seabird Group and to the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society for their generous grant and donation towards the costs of our 2018 expedition.

Roll on the Seabirds Count 2019 season...

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Keith Cowieson

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Plate 16. Bridge End Outdoor Centre, Burra.

Simmer dim 2: RAFOS/ RNBWS seabird census, Shetland, June 2019

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN

(All photographs by the author)

First, a scene-setter. This article complements Keith Cowieson's account of Simmer dim 1, but his was written some time after he and his team returned from Orkney in 2018, when all the results were available. My report on the other hand is written just a few days after our return from Shetland, so this is very much a first impressions report, and we will have to wait some months to see the full results of our efforts.

Three RNBWS members teamed up with RAFOS for 11 days over mid-summer 2019 in the field, counting seabirds in continuation of the national Sea Monitoring Programme (SMP) of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland. Keith Cowieson was again in overall charge and was responsible for much of the planning and organisation, and to him goes much of the credit for what was undoubtedly a most successful and enjoyable expedition. The last census was completed in 2002¹, and the aim of our endeavours was to gather data on breeding numbers of seabirds for analysts to see how distributions and populations have changed.

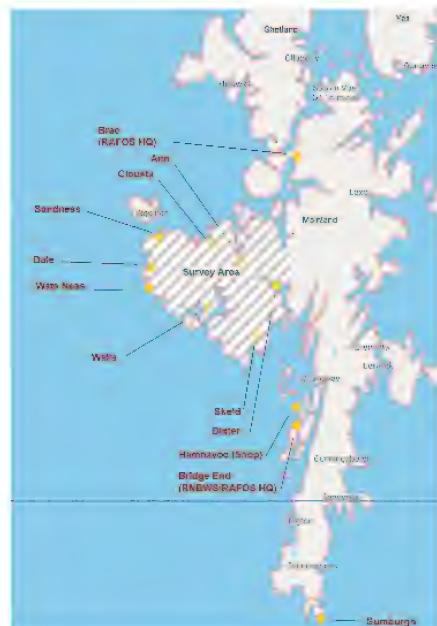


Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.

¹ *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland*, by P. Ian Mitchell, Stephen Newton, Norman Ratcliffe & Tim E Dunn (eds.) 2004 by T & AD Poyser, an imprint of A&C Black, ISBN 0-7136-6901-2

Our allocated area for 2019 was the Shetlands, and entailed making systematic counts of cliff nesting, ground nesting and non-breeding sea birds. There were 15 of us in total, and we were split into two teams. RAFOS took a northern sector based at Voxter House, Brae, and a joint RNBWS/RAFOS team worked the West Mainland sector from a budget self-catering base at the Bridge End Outdoor Centre on West Burra.

Our team covered an area of 86 km², and counts were made by walking transects of squares and surveying by telescope from vantage points. A minibus was used to drop and recover the two-man count teams, and as mobile phone signals were seldom available, teams were equipped with radios to keep in contact with the transport. Cliff tops were easy walking compared to trekking across the peat bogs and heather-covered peat moorland where the skuas and gulls nested.

Under the spirited leadership of Jim Bryden data collection was a very systematic process. The teams counted the various species, and noted whether the birds were in apparently occupied territories (AOT), apparently occupied nests (AON), individuals on land at a colony (IND), or on the sea adjacent to a colony (SEA). At the end of each day's field work, and before dinner, we sat around the table and passed data from our field notebooks to Al Brimmel and Brian Lyon, the data coordinators, to complete the SMP paper forms. From these forms records are entered into the national database, but internet connectivity at the lodgings was not reliable enough to complete this step during the survey phase.



Plate 17. The joint RNBWS/RAFOS team in the West Mainland sector.



Plate 18. Pete Evans and Tony Marter counting Fulmar nests.



Plate 19. Jim Bryden (right) with team surveying loch shore.



Plate 20. Tony Marter looking for Shag nests.



Plate 21. Challenging terrain on Stourbrough Hill.

The area we covered was West Mainland, where the terrain is varied but treeless, with few houses. Peat cutting used to be a major activity, and we saw a few areas in which this still goes on, but otherwise it was sheep everywhere. For our surveys we visited Skeld, Bixter, Walls, Aith, Clousta, Dale and Sandness in the north west. Hamnavoe was the nearest village to our lodgings at Bridge End with a shop and post office (open on Wednesdays). The daily journey from our base to a survey area was about 50 minutes' drive along mostly metalled twisting single-track roads with passing places, sometimes with huge diversions to round a voe, as Shetlanders call a sea loch.

As we discovered in West Shetland, a typical cliff top count, near Wats Ness for example, included Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*, Razorbill *Alca torda*, Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle*, European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Great Skua, *Stercorarius skua*, Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* and Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, while on pebble beaches we found nesting colonies of Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* and gulls. By careful observation counters were able to determine whether birds were occupying nests, or territories, or were apparently non-breeders, and as well as providing data for the seabird census our teams logged over 60 bird species on the BTO BirdTrack species lists of casual records, plus data for the BTO nest record scheme. Other sightings included Atlantic Seal *Halichoerus grypus*, Common Seal *Phoca vitulina*, Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus*, Otter *Lutra lutra*, several Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* with cygnets, a single female Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* and many Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*. There are no deer on Shetland. Unexpectedly there were usually several sightings daily of migrant Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui* butterflies.

Once assembled the counts will show trends in numbers and inform conservation plans. It is far too early to say how overall numbers compare with earlier surveys, but there are concerns that rising sea temperatures and declining fish stocks are having a big negative impact on some species such as Kittiwake and Puffin.

I found the trekking challenging, carrying food, water and optical equipment. The weather was generally cold for summer months, around 10°C, and rapidly changeable so we generally carried or wore waterproofs.



a)



b)



c)



d)

Plate 22 a. Fulmar greeting display, Wats Ness. b. Common Gull at AOT. c. Black Guillemot with fish, Bridge End. d. Puffins on sea below cliffs, Wats Ness.

Was it worth it? Yes! We completed the task without major incident. The isolation, the wild scenery, the continuous dusk past midnight, the calls of Curlews, plovers, Redshank, Snipe drumming and Oystercatchers, plus aerial attacks by low flying Bonxies are all images that will remain.

Acknowledgements

None of this would have happened without the detailed 32 page Administrative Order and impeccable planning by Keith Cowieson, Expedition Leader, and our sub-team leader Jim Bryden.

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Plate 23. Lake Eymir. © C Moorey

A birding year in the life of a Turkish lake

by Commander Chris Moorey RN, British Naval Attaché Ankara

Ankara is a sprawling, densely urban, largely administrative capital city of some five and a half million people situated at an elevation of around 1,000 metres in the middle of the bleak Anatolian steppe. With that knowledge, along with the fact that the nearest coastline is some 100 nm to the North, I had kept my birding expectations low for my latest overseas appointment - and I certainly did not expect to be writing any articles for *Sea Swallow*. However, Turkey as a whole has turned out to be a gem of a country for birdwatching. Not only is it a crossroads in terms of human endeavour, it also acts as such for the birds. Even Ankara itself has not disappointed, especially during the spring and autumn migrations. Winter does see a significant reduction in the number and variety of small birds, as many resident species leave the chill of the Anatolian highlands for warmer coastal areas, with the urban parks becoming the domain of multitudes of hardy Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix*, Jackdaws *C. monedula* and Magpies *Pica pica*. The joys of birdwatching in Ankara are largely down to a small number of key locations, including the subject of this article, Lake Eymir (*Eymir Gölü* in Turkish).

Lake Eymir is an S-shaped lake lying on the southern edge of Ankara. It is not large, with a surface area of just over a square kilometer and approximately four kilometers in length, with average depths of five metres in winter and four metres in summer. Until a few decades ago, the steep hillsides surrounding the lake were arid and devoid of any significant greenery. However, the land in which Lake Eymir sits was allocated to the Middle East Technical University in 1956 and the university immediately began a forestry project and the lake is now ringed by reeds and mixed woodlands interspersed with flowery meadows.

Turning to the title of this short account, in order to describe the lake's annual birdlife cycle, it is probably best to outline the 'baseline' population of resident birds before going on to describe the annual ebb and flow of winter visitors and summer breeders. The resident waterbird population is relatively unexciting: a few Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos*, hundreds of Eurasian Coots *Fulica atra*, a small number of Common Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus*, dozens of Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* and a good number of Dabchicks *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. The surrounding woods and meadows support a decent enough range: Syrian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos syriacus*, Lesser Spotted *D. minor* and Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*; House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Tree Sparrow *P. montanus*; Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*; Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*; Hooded Crow, Magpie and Jay *Garrulus glandarius*; Great Tit *Parus major*, Blue *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Coal *Periparus ater*, Long-tailed *Aegithalos caudatus* and (very occasionally) Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*; Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and Blackbird *Turdus merula*. The reeds that line the greater part of the lake's shores, especially at each end, support small resident populations of Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus* and Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*. Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* are resident and breed by the lakeside, whilst Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* and Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* put in frequent appearances.

The annual weather cycle in Ankara ranges from sub-zero temperatures and snow in winter to dry heat and temperatures in the mid-30s in the summer months. The chilliest and often snowiest months of January and February see a good number of Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* joined by a few Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* and Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*. Several hundred Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* are present over the winter and remain until April, whilst the occasional Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* works the shoreline. A small number (three to six) of both Great *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Pygmy Cormorants *Microcarbo pygmaeus* spend winter at the lake, with the Great Cormorants utilizing any handy lakeside perch,



Plate 24 a. Great-crested Grebe. © S Copsey b. Black-crowned Night Heron. © M Alabaster c. Marsh Harrier. © S Copsey

whilst the Pygmy Cormorants spend most of their time in the reedbed lagoons at the western end of the lake. The Pygmy Cormorants move on by May, leaving the Great Cormorants to put in appearances throughout the year.

As the weather begins to warm up (although chilly blasts and snow can persist well into April), March sees the early migrants and summer visitors begin to arrive at the lake, with a good number of Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* feeding over the surface of the lake and a small number of Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* gracing the wooded slopes around the lake. Come April, a wave of new arrivals descends upon the lake: hundreds of House Martin *Delichon urbicum*, as well as Common Swift *Apus apus*, feed overhead, while a smaller number of Barn Swallow skim over the surface of the lake. The resident Mallards are joined by Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* that raise chicks amongst the reedbeds, and small numbers of Common Pochard *Aythya farina*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* and Garganey *Anas querquedula* drop in en-route to their breeding sites. A few Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* spend a few weeks feeding on the lake and the occasional White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* and Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* put in appearances overhead. Meanwhile, the lakeside woods support a wide variety of new arrivals: huge numbers of Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*, smaller but still significant numbers of Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, along with Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita* and Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*. The reedbeds seem to sport a singing Great Reed *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* or Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* every few metres along the lakeside. May sees the migration continue in full swing, with all of the April species still moving through. Also in May, the lake's breeders are joined by several heron species: Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*; Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, all of which are largely concentrated in the larger expanses of reeds at each end of the lake.

By the first half of June, most of the migrants have headed north, leaving the resident species and a summer breeding population of various warblers, a few Eurasian Hoopoes, Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus*, Spotted Flycatchers and Common Nightingales to sit out the hot months. As the Summer moves on into mid-July, even the Great and Eurasian Reed Warblers seem to lose their spring enthusiasm and the tempo of their song from the lakeside reeds falls away. The first southbound arrivals appear in September, gaining momentum in October, including Eurasian Wrynecks, the warblers, the flycatchers, including a small number of Red-breasted Flycatchers *Ficedula parva*, plus a fair number of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*.

The arrival of November takes us back to where we began, with the resident species being re-joined by the Black-headed Gulls, Northern Shovelers, Pygmy Cormorants and the occasional Western Great Egret *Egretto alba*.

So we complete the annual birding cycle of Eymir Lake, as I have seen it over the last 12 months. I know there is much more to find, as I have tended so far to concentrate on the shores of the lake, somewhat neglecting the surrounding hillsides and wooded meadows. If the Editor is prepared to accept another rather land-centric article, I shall send in an update next year.

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Ian Strange

Ian Strange, the RNBWS Falklands rep for many years, died just as the last issue of *Sea Swallow* was going to print; he had been suffering from cancer for some time, and his last report for *Sea Swallow* was in 2013.

I got to know him quite well in the mid nineteen sixties, when I was serving in the old HMS *Protector*. He had gone to the Falklands to set up a mink farm and that was still running during my time there but closed down soon after. Ian remained in the islands, gaining a reputation as a conservationist, engraver and painter, and he produced several successful books.

I spent many a day with Ian, but two stand out. The first was a thrilling day on Beauchêne Island with *Protector* standing off on a rare still day. The second was less enjoyable. Ian had long wanted to measure one of the feral cattle to see how they had diverged from domestic cattle over the years. As those who know the Falklands will confirm, these are not friendly beasts, and it would be necessary to shoot one. The ship's First Lieutenant and the Surgeon Commander were keen volunteers, and we set off in the helicopter for Volunteer Point, where we knew there was a small herd. Having found the group, we dropped off our two marksmen and our multi-role helicopter was then used in the cattle herding mode. We were successful in separating one beast from the others and nudged it towards the shooters, who were crouched behind a large tussock. Then came the shots — we couldn't hear them but we saw the beast fall — a clean kill.

At this point the two intrepid gunmen withdrew from the proceedings, sat down in the lee of their tussock, had a cigarette, and stoically awaited their helo lift back. As for Ian and me, we had the job of measuring and then dismembering this massive cow and get the bits in a state to put in the back of the helicopter. I should add that this was definitely not a still day - a fierce westerly wind whipped up the sand and that and the unwelcome attentions of about a dozen skuas made it a rather grisly experience for me. To cap it all, the wind meant that we made only about 20 knots over the ground on the way back to the ship and I have to admit that once we had landed I too rather lost interest, so I never came to know what Ian's findings on the physiognomy of the feral cattle were.

I ought to mention that some fifty years later when I became editor of *Sea Swallow* I was made aware of a degree of professional disapproval of Ian's research methods and findings, and I know he felt that keenly. That said, I think it can fairly be claimed that he did much to promote conservation in the Falklands.



Plate 25. Ian Strange, Beauchêne Island, 1964.
© D Dobson

David Dobson

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Plate 26. (L-R) Luis Cervera, David Morgan, Hector Sanchez and Pablo Bolzán in Stanley.

Crash sites and caracaras

by David Morgan DSC

(All photographs by the author except where indicated)

Flight Lieutenant Morgan RAF served as a Sea Harrier pilot in 800 Naval Air Squadron on HMS *Hermes* during the Falklands conflict. He subsequently transferred to the Royal Navy and retired as a Lieutenant Commander.

In March 2018 I was asked whether I would be able to travel to the Falkland Islands, an unusual request made even more interesting by the fact that the request came from a retired Fuerza Aérea Argentina pilot. Hector Sanchez and I had first encountered each other on a very dark evening 37 years ago at extremely low level, near Lively Island, some 60 miles southwest of Stanley. His formation of four Skyhawks was attacking a landing craft of HMS *Fearless* when my wingman and I appeared on the scene. Hector was the only Argentine to get home.

The plan was for my wife and me to fly down on the Airbridge from RAF Brize Norton (not a trip for the fainthearted) and meet Hector in Stanley. His party included Luis Cervera (another A4 pilot) and Pablo Bolzán whose father had been killed on 8 June '82 by my wingman's Sidewinder after I had emptied my guns at him. We planned to visit the crash site and erect a small memorial as well as trying to find the wreckage of a Dagger on Lively Island that had been flown by Hector's best friend, José Ardiles.

There had been little time to appreciate the wildlife of the islands during my first visit in 1982. Indeed, the only contact I had with the local avian population was trying to avoid hitting albatrosses and watching the Yellow-billed Sheathbills *Chionis alba* perching unconcernedly on the lip of HMS *Hermes*' ski-jump whilst a formation of Sea Harriers waited impatiently and noisily to get airborne. This time however, I resolved to make more of an effort to explore East Falkland and its indigenous fauna.



Plate 27 a. King Penguin incubating egg. b. Magellanic Penguin. c. Gentoo Penguin.

On our first day in Stanley, we met up with Hector and Luis and walked out to Stanley airfield. This has changed little since the war and the control tower still bears scars from my cluster bombs. It is also possible to see the mostly now-filled craters of Black Buck 1's thousand-pound bombs, as they march from the edge of the runway up over Canopus Hill. From the tower we could see elegant Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris* patrolling the shoreline and the inner harbour.

The following day was very special; my wife and I were driven to the Volunteer Point reserve to visit the penguin colonies. The journey was a ninety-minute drive over stone tracks, followed by another two hours of extreme off-road excursion. We travelled in convoy across a landscape of bog and tussac grass under wonderful blue skies until, cresting a hill, we saw the rookeries. They are on a spit of land between a beautiful white-sand beach and a lagoon and contain thousands of chattering and very smelly birds which seemed completely oblivious to our presence. The three common types of local penguin were all in evidence; the beautiful and seemingly aloof King Penguins *Aptenodytes patagonicus*, the slightly smaller Gentoos *Pygoscelis papua* and finally the burrowing Magellanic *Spheniscus magellanicus*.

Many of the Kings were brooding eggs on their upturned feet (no low-flying allowed!) and a number of chicks had already hatched. In addition, there were many extremely tame Upland Geese *Chloephaga picta*. These totally wild birds have no fear of humans at all and will happily peck your shoe-laces in search of a treat.

Surprisingly on this particular day, the wind had dropped below the usual 20 knots and we were able to enjoy a picnic in the dunes overlooking the perfect white sand and azure-blue sea. Were it not for the penguins waddling past and the odd Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus* skittering through the sea cabbage, it could have been the Caribbean on a cool day.



Plate 28. Two-banded Plover.



Plate 29. Wreckage of Shyhawk flown by Danilo Bolzar.



Plate 30. Tussac-bird drinking from pool of water in wreckage of Skyhawk.



Plate 31. Diddle-dee berries.

Next morning I joined Hector and his compatriots on another eight-hour boggy safari to visit the wreckage of Danilo Bolzán's Skyhawk on Hammond Point. His son was accompanied by a dozen of his friends and together we built a small cairn and placed a simple memorial. It was quite an emotional few hours but I was able to explain to both Hector and Pablo the exact details of our fight and show them the evidence of a Sidewinder warhead on the tailplane and fuselage. There was no doubt that the aircraft had been hit at very low level and exploded in mid-air.

As we were working around the largest piece of wreckage, I realised that two Tussac-birds *Cinclodes antarcticus* were using it for shelter, which somehow seemed very appropriate. They were very happy hopping amongst us and feasting on the massive crop of didde-dee berries.

Day three saw us driving around the north of East Falkland, past Teal Inlet to Port San Carlos. This is where the Harrier Forward Operating Base was established in May '82 and my first reaction when I saw it again was "Bloody hell, that's small!" And small it was — only 650 ft in length — but that was enough to get airborne with a full weapon load and internal fuel. HMS Sheathbill (or Sid's Strip if you were RAF) made a huge difference to our available time on patrol, increasing it from 5 minutes when operating from the ship to more than an hour when operating from the FOB.



Plate 32 a. Female Upland Goose. b. Dark-faced Ground Tyrant on the wall of the British Cemetery. c. Striated Caracara. © S Copsey

It was here that we had problems with the local wildlife in '82, as the Upland Geese discovered that the tin strip was lovely and warm and a good place to sit. The judicious use of size ten boots didn't offer a lasting remedy, so a number were 'liberated' and became the Goose Galtieri main course at the Wardroom Victory Dinner.

Our next destination was the British Cemetery in San Carlos. This is a beautiful, peaceful and well-kept site, and not at all mournful. Having found a few friends on the list of those who have no grave, I spied a stunning Long-tailed Meadowlark *Sturnella loyca* but it refused to be photographed. I did however capture a good shot of a Dark-faced Ground-tyrant *Muscisaxicola maclovianus* perching on the cemetery wall before we headed for Goose Green to pay our respects to Lt Nick Taylor, who was shot down on 4 May.

Our penultimate day in the islands was spent exploring the battlefields to the west of Stanley and gaining an appreciation of just what an amazing feat of arms the battles for Mount Longdon, Tumbledown and Wireless Ridge were. There is little left of the detritus of war; just the odd rusting gun and cluster bomb casing, and most of the minefields have now been cleared. This has apparently reduced the pickings for the Striated Caracaras *Phalcoboenus australis* that scavenge in the mountains and uplands.

Then came the long and slightly melancholic journey home. The wild but amazingly tame beauty of the islands has left a lasting impression on both of us and I feel that I can now close the door on that part of my life. It was wonderful at last to be able to appreciate the wildlife and to realise that those of us who went south in '82 have enabled the islands to flourish and grow in a way that probably would not have happened without the Task Force.

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Figure 1. Map showing places visited. (inset) MV Black Watch.

Exploring the Greenland fjords on board MV Black Watch, 17 Aug–1 Sep 2018

by Chris Bielby; RNBWS member, former schoolmaster
and current cruise ship wildlife guide.

(All photographs by the author)

I was a guest speaker on this stately Fred Olsen cruise ship, giving a series of presentations on natural history topics: the wildlife to look out for, the evolution of whales, wonders of migration, Charles Darwin and the evolution of humankind. I also spent a lot of time on sea days conducting deck watches and spotting and identifying the wildlife we encountered in order to enhance the experience for passengers.

The itinerary of this 14 day cruise included Reykjavik and Isafjordur in Iceland, then across the Denmark Straits to Qaqortoq, Narsarsuaq and Nanortalik in Greenland, before sailing back to Belfast and thence to Liverpool. I anticipated some good sightings of cetaceans as well as birds, based on my previous experiences in these waters, but dependant on weather conditions of course.

I was delighted to find that an old friend, Professor Tom Brereton, was on board as a passenger. He is an expert cetacean surveyor and ornithologist and throughout the cruise made meticulous records, to which he has kindly given me access.

This article is based primarily on my notes but I have omitted details of the positions of the whale sightings as I am very aware that the barbarous hunting of Fin and Minke Whales is still practised by one company based in Reykjavik.

17 August: departure from Liverpool at 17:00 hrs into a damp and misty Irish Sea.

The usual gulls - Black-headed *Larus ridibundus*, Common *Larus canus*, Herring *Larus argentatus*, Greater *Larus marinus* and Lesser Black-backed *Larus fuscus* accompanied our departure, but Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* and five adult and sub-adult Little Gulls *Hydrocoloeus minutus* were feeding along the tidelines. Sandwich *Sterna sandvicensis* and Common Terns *S. hirundo* fished by the fairway and two Harbour Porpoises *Phocoena phocoena* showed briefly as we left Liverpool astern. As a gloomy dusk fell we headed northwest towards the North Channel with a single Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*, small groups of Guillemots *Uria aalge*, three Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*, a Gannet *Morus bassanus* and a Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* sighted as well as three Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* to brighten the twilight.

18 August: at Sea north of Ireland. Although the northerly wind was only force five or so, there was a heavy swell, up to seven metres, as a result of a previous storm, and the foredeck was closed. This meant that our observations were carried out from aft on six deck allowing views both sides but little ahead. Despite this we soon spotted Manx Shearwaters, Gannets, Great Black-backed Gulls and many Fulmars and these were to be a feature of every sea day during the cruise. The menacing profile of our first Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* plodded into the wind and two Sooty Shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* effortlessly scythed their way across the crests. Lesser Black-backed Gulls continued to accompany us, riding the eddies behind the ship, and we encountered more Guillemots, Razorbills *Alca torda* and Puffins *Fratercula arctica*. A group of around 30 Common Dolphins *Delphinus delphis* was spotted by a passenger late morning and during the afternoon more Manx Shearwaters, five more Sooty Shearwaters and another Great Skua as well as three Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* flew south across our course. Late afternoon we added four Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* and more Manx Shearwaters to our list and Tom spotted a single Basking Shark *Cetorhinus maximus* before sunset at 21:00 hrs.

19 August: at Sea, North Atlantic. The morning watch was again conducted from aft as the headwind and continuing swell prevented watching on the foredeck. Dawn revealed several Manx Shearwaters and Puffins as well as the ubiquitous Gannets and Fulmars following the ship as we continued to sail towards Iceland. Two groups of Pilot Whales *Globicephala melas* and an unidentified dead Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon* sp. were spotted as well as a migrant Black-tailed Godwit



Plate 33. Blue Whales. **Plate 34 (opposite) a.** Orca, Cape Farewell. **b.** Minke Whale Reykjavik. **c.** Manx Shearwaters, Reykjavik. **d.** Great Shearwater. **e.** Fulmar. **f.** Gannet with Sooty Shearwater. **g.** White-beaked Dolphins. **h.** Humpbacks sounding.



Limosa limosa, a single Teal *Anas crecca* and two unidentified dolphins seen only briefly. At 09:10 hrs an elegant adult Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* flew south across our wake. At 10:30 hrs Tom spotted five Atlantic White-sided Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus acutus* and shortly afterwards three Arctic Terns passed the ship on their way south. At noon we were about 160 nm from Reykjavik and over 2,500 metres of water above the Icelandic Basin.

At 12:30 hrs we began to see large vertical whale blows mostly at some distance, which we thought to be probably Fin Whales *Balaenoptera physalus*. However, at 13:15 hrs repeated angled blows revealed a Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* which eventually fluked as we passed it on the port side. From 14:00 hrs we continued to see large whale blows, seven of which proved to be Fin Whales, showing their dark grey colour and sharply angled dorsal fins as they slipped below the waves. One of the lower blows may possibly have been a Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis* with a tall erect dorsal fin evident in photographs examined later. These were accompanied by flocks of 10–60 Manx Shearwaters in evidently rich feeding waters. At 17:30 hrs two whales blew some 500 metres on the starboard side and immediately looked very interesting, being very large animals but with bushy blows and more splashing than most of the Fin Whales. They surfaced and blew twice more before crossing our stern and showing their huge curved, blue backs and small dorsal fins; two Blue Whales *Balaenoptera musculus*, possibly three! These were completely unexpected but excellent views and their atypical initial blows, which were probably due to their lunge feeding at the surface, were replaced by the usual tall columnar blows as they crossed our wake. The presence of many Manx Shearwaters, with odd Leach's *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* and European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* and Puffins confirmed the richness of these waters. After 18:00 hrs a small pod of around ten Pilot Whales was spotted astern and a further five or six Fin Whales before dusk. Another Leach's Storm-petrel, a Pomarine and three Long-tailed Skuas were added to the list of species seen before the watch ended due to bad light.



Plate 35 a. Lesser Butterfly Orchid. b. Rhodiola rosea Narsarsuaq. c. Moonwort Narsarsuaq.

20 August: arrival at Reykjavik. First light found us entering harbour in dull and wet conditions and glowering low cloud; not an auspicious start to our two-day stay in the Icelandic capital. Glaucous Gulls *Larus hyperboreus* and Black Guillemots *Cephus grylle* graced the harbour, with Oystercatchers *Haemotopus ostralegus*, Eider Ducks *Somateria mollissima*, Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* and Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* on the shoreline, with the commoner large gulls, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and Arctic Terns feeding in the water. Most passengers disembarked to join the many excursions arranged for them to see the geological gems of this beautiful country.

21 August: at Reykjavik. After another very wet morning, Tom and I embarked on a whale-watching excursion on board one of the tour boats. The weather immediately improved and we were soon motoring out into the bay in sunshine and flat calm conditions, perfect for spotting Harbour Porpoises which were abundant and often in small family groups. We soon encountered feeding Minke Whales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*, often signalled by flocks of Manx Shearwaters and Arctic Terns which were in turn harried by the piratical Arctic Skuas *Stercorarius parasiticus*. After watching at least three different Minkes, we motored further out and soon spotted about five White-beaked Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus albirostris* which proceeded to feed around the stationary boat before heading away again. After this most successful and enjoyable afternoon we returned to the ship noting the Greylag Geese *Anser anser* feeding on the roadside verges.

We sailed at 19:45 hrs noting an adult Iceland Gull *Larus glaucopterus*, Glaucous Gulls, two Arctic Skuas, Kittiwakes and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, as well a single Minke Whale, two Porpoises and several White-beaked Dolphins as we headed into a beautiful sunset with the distinctive profile of the snow-capped Snaefellsjokull volcano on the starboard quarter.

22 August: Isafjordur, an excursion to Hestoryi, and passage towards the Denmark Straits. Early morning found us sailing under low cloud through the dark fjord with at least ten Humpback Whales *Megaptera novaengliae* blowing and fluking on both sides of the ship, but at some distance. A group of about six White-beaked Dolphins was much closer and we were escorted by a variety of gulls including several Glaucous and Iceland, most of which settled on the Fish Factory roof as we docked at Isafjordur. Arctic Terns and Arctic Skuas patrolled the harbour and small flocks of Eiders, mainly females with crèches of ducklings, fed around the rocky shore.

As I was gathering a group of passengers on shore in preparation for an excursion to Hestoryi, a small abandoned village, all the gulls took flight in alarm. I immediately looked for the cause and spotted a huge grey Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* flying towards us at roof-top height before disappearing behind the bridge of the ship. Unfortunately, it did not reappear but those few seconds of clear close view will long remain in my memory, and those of the passengers with me.

After a few minutes we encountered the Humpbacks again and we throttled back as a group of three swam towards us, eventually diving about 50 metres away, an awesome sight! There were at least four others in this feeding group. We continued across the fjord and about ten minutes later I spotted a pod of about six Orca *Orcinus orca* swimming parallel with us about 800 metres to starboard. Hestoryi itself is a charming place, the houses now retained only as holiday homes and the ground overgrown. However, large stands of Angelica *Angelica dahurica* attracted many insects and moths, and the furry tufts of Arctic Willow *Salix glauca* bordered the

paths. Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* and Redwings *Turdus iliacus* perched on the trees and rooftops, with Redshanks *Tringa tetanus* and Glaucous Gulls on the shore with about 20 Harbour Seals basking on rocks. A single Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* flew over calling, adding more atmosphere to this tranquil place. A Black Guillemot was swimming by our boat as we left and we saw two Humpbacks blowing as we approached Isafjordur.

As we sailed out we could see at least six Humpbacks blowing several miles up the fjord to the north and one breached continuously for more than ten minutes on our starboard side as we sailed west. A Pomarine Skua and three more White-beaked Dolphins brought our evening watch to a close.

23 August: crossing the Denmark Straits towards Greenland. We now had calmer seas and good visibility as we sailed west accompanied by many Fulmars including some of the northern blue morph, and occasional Kittiwakes. Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas made occasional sorties around the ship and Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* began to appear in ones and twos with their languid shearing flight over the oily swell. During the morning we spotted two distant pods of Orca and later 14 Pilot Whales, three Fin Whales, eight White-beaked Dolphins and several blows from three medium-sized whales we could not identify. Single Harbour Seals *Phoca vitulina* and Grey Seals were also spotted. The day drew to a close with a wonderful sunset filling the western sky with vivid orange hues while the eastern sky was diffused with violet and pink bands over a turquoise sea.

24 August: sailing through Prins Christiansund, Greenland. It was a gloomy wet morning as we approached the entrance to this remarkable fjord. Fulmars, Great and Sooty Shearwaters flew around the ship and checking out our wake, and we passed three Minke Whales and another pod of about nine Pilot Whales. About a mile from



Plate 36. 3rd Glacier Prins Christiansund. **Plate 37 (opposite)** a. Iceland Gull. b. Kittiwake. c. Long-tailed Skua. d. Whimbrel. e. Arctic Skua. f. Puffin. g. Guillemot. h. Black Guillemot.



the narrow mouth of the sound we passed within 500 metres of a Sperm Whale blowing regularly on the surface and eventually fluking as it dived astern of the ship, and this in pretty shallow water! The geology and scenery of this fjord are truly awesome with several large glaciers feeding small bergs into the main channel and the most impressive near-vertical cliffs and spires of frost-shattered stone above the corries and hanging valleys of this ice-sculpted world. Iceland Gulls patrolled the sound and a few Black Guillemots clustered on the rare horizontal rocks by the shoreline. One braided river delta held a roost of gulls, mainly Iceland and Glaucous, but also a couple of Snow Buntings *Plectrophenax nivalis* on the sparse vegetation below the scree slopes, while several Ravens *Corvus corux* scavenged along the shore. four Bearded Seals *Erignathus barbatus* were seen associating with the ice floes, and later a probable Harp Seal *Pagophilus groenlandicus* showed briefly. The sea was calm in the sound but as we headed out into the open sea a violent squall lifted spray from the sea and led to the foredecks being closed again. Sheltering on deck eight starboard side we managed to stay out of the gale, now blowing from our stern, and were rewarded by the spectacular sight of a pod of three Orca ploughing powerfully into the storm and throwing up spray as they passed about 800m away, rapidly disappearing from view into the spume and spray of the building waves. As we left behind the impressive skyline it was engulfed by dark glowering storm clouds, but we encountered feeding flocks of Puffins and Kittiwakes with Fulmars, including a few of the blue race, and Great Shearwaters wheeling above them. Soon the cold and bad light stopped play and we closed the watch after an enthralling day.

25 August: at Qaqortoq. The scenic sail into this working town was enhanced by a breaching Humpback Whale which gave great views. The town itself has a large working harbour and a fish factory which serves the whole region and as a result it is more functional than picturesque. The rusting debris of old boats and fishing tackle seemed to be very attractive to a flock of Snow Buntings and a few Lapland Buntings *Calcarius lapponicus* which also fed on the weed seeds between the houses and sheds. Greenland Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa* 'ticked' from rooftops and fences, and small flocks of Common Redpolls *Carduelis flammea* flew around calling constantly. Although Glaucous, Iceland, Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls loafed on every rock and warehouse roof, it was Ravens which dominated the sky above the town and the shoreline, their vocal and aerobatic displays a constant backdrop to this urban landscape. I followed the river up to the large lake noting a gull roost of all the

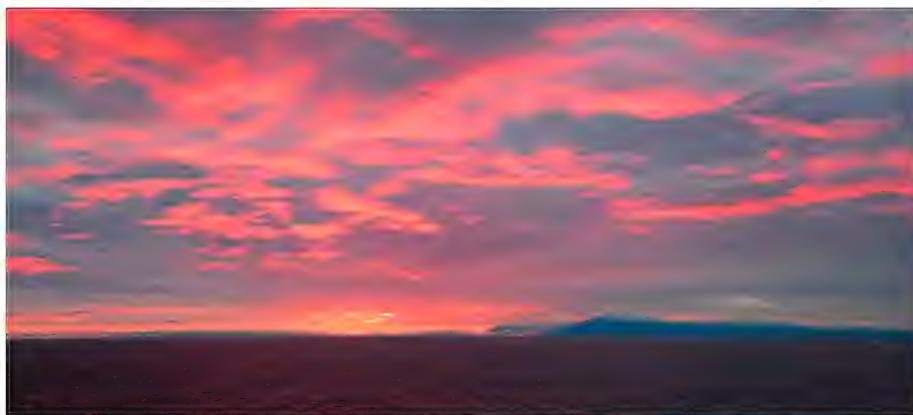


Plate 38. Sunset, Snaefelsnes.

local species on some rocky islets and a family of Red-breasted Mergansers *Mergus serrator* feeding in the shallows close by. As I walked along the shore the white rumps of the Wheatears bounced ahead like leading lights. I heard the distinctive call of a falcon from the cliffs above but could not locate the bird due to low cloud. The haunting yodel of Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer* echoed around the valley and I eventually spotted two adults feeding two well grown juveniles. An Inuit family was collecting Blueberries and fungi on the hillside as I headed back towards the harbour and the bustle of this working fishing village and boarded the shuttle back to the ship.

We sailed at 17:30 hrs and as we left Qaqortoq astern we passed five Harbour Porpoises and then spotted the Humpback Whale again as it breached close in to the shore on our port side. As the fjord opened to the sea we encountered many large whales blowing, which proved to include another two Humpbacks and ten Fin Whales with a less showy Minke Whale at close quarters as it crossed under the bows.

26 August: at Narsarsuaq. We docked at the small harbour opposite Eric the Red's village with several large icebergs drifting down the fjord in between. The shrubs along the shore held many Common Redpolls with Greenland Wheatears and Lapland Buntings, while Ravens patrolled constantly overhead. Mosquitoes were a real problem on this warm, calm day and a walk around the old WWII US transit airfield 'Bluie West One' by the braided river yielded a pair of Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis*, several Mallard and 11 White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* loafing on the gravel banks! These were mainly immatures or juveniles but one adult flew along the fjord and over the ship. The ground was very dry and covered in mosses and Arctic Willow but with small clumps of pink Dwarf Fireweed *Chamerion latifolium*, the national plant of Greenland, and some spikes of *Rhodiola rosea* as well as clumps of Mountain Sorrel *Oxyria digyna*. Several passengers got excellent views and photographs of a beautiful white Arctic Hare *Lepus arcticus* and many enjoyed the boat trips to see the glacier fjord with its spectacular and colourful icebergs, some of which we passed as we sailed away along the Tunulliarfik Fjord that evening. A Harp Seal and two other unidentified Seals were spotted along with another Humpback Whale and a Sperm Whale before the light faded.

27 August: Nanortalik. Early next morning we anchored offshore and shuttled in to this delightful Inuit settlement with its preserved living museum of original wooden buildings, to be greeted by a family in authentic Inuit clothing. They subsequently demonstrated launching and sailing the large skin Umiak boats and also Kayaking and Eskimo Rolls. Once again Greenland Wheatears, Snow and Lapland Buntings flew around the houses and Common Redpolls churred overhead as Ravens patrolled constantly. We sailed at 13:00 hrs and made our way out of the fjord and along the south coast, around Cape Farewell where we could again admire the spectacular nunataks above Prins Christiansund, but from the west. We passed a number of seals, four of which were Harp Seals, and several large whale blows included those of two Humpbacks and two Fin Whales. Two small flocks of about ten Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* were flushed from the sea and several Arctic Skuas pursued Kittiwakes while Fulmars and Iceland Gulls escorted us away from the coast. A further eight unidentified whales with large vertical blows showed as the light faded.

28 August: At sea towards Iceland. Dawn found us sailing a more northerly course than expected and the Captain announced that we were diverting towards Iceland as a result of a medical emergency on board, with the intention of rendezvousing

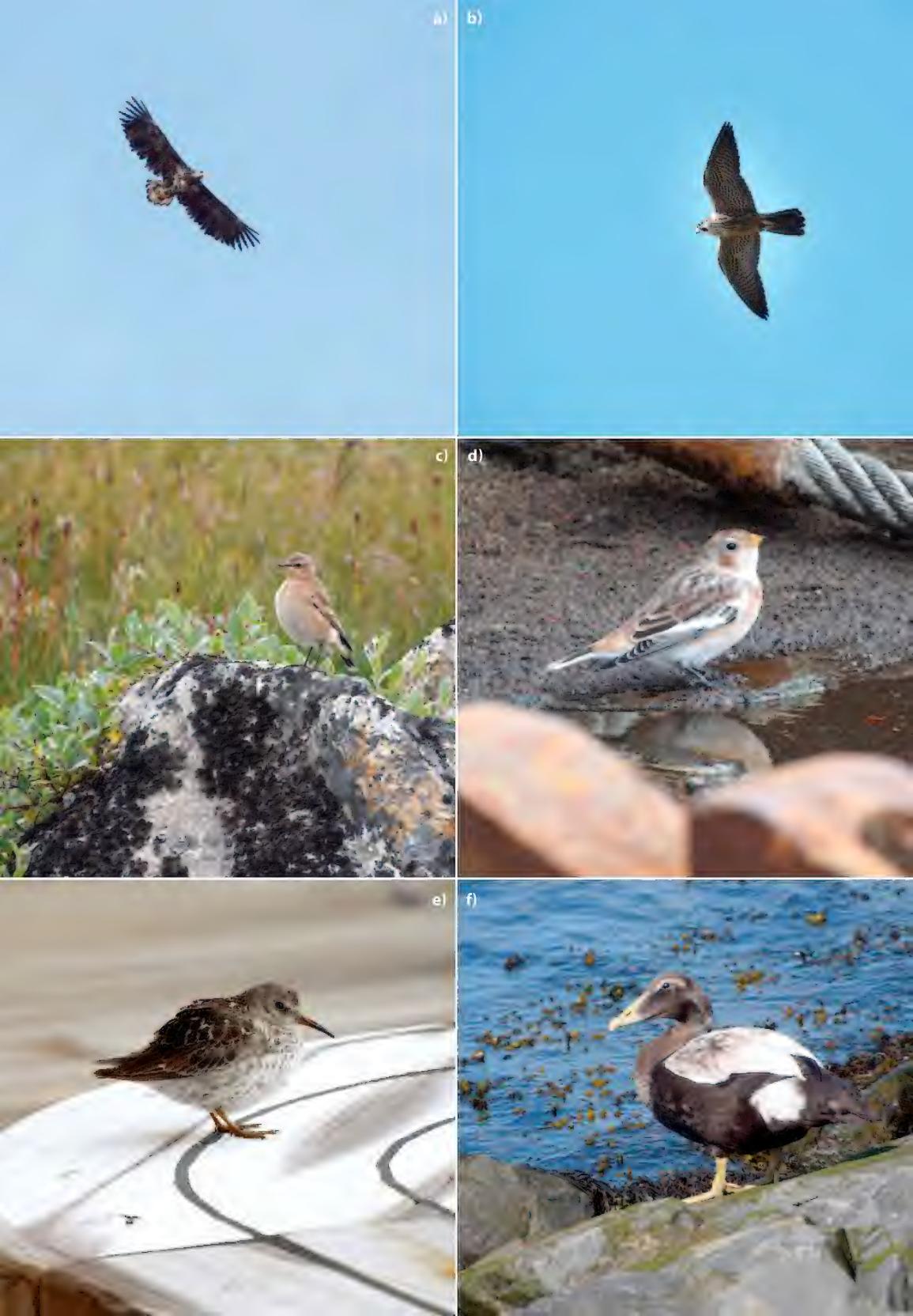
with a rescue helicopter for a medivac. We also noted some stowaways on board in the form of two Greenland Wheatears and a Purple Sandpiper, the last being very tame. During the afternoon we began to see many large whale blows and 13 Fin Whales were positively identified. A single Pilot Whale and two Northern Bottlenose Whales *Hyperodon ampullatus* were also spotted and photographed as were several obliging Great Shearwaters.

29 August: At sea south of Iceland. The medivac was accomplished successfully at 06:30 hrs by an Icelandic rescue helicopter, and we altered course towards Northern Ireland. This took us across rarely travelled sea above the Icelandic Basin, between 150 and 250 km south of Iceland, and we soon spotted the blows of large whales. The sea was now calm and by midday we could watch from the foredeck in comfort, allowing me to alert Tom and the passengers on the side and aft decks that we were approaching large whales after spotting huge columnar blows several miles ahead. These proved to be mixed groups of Fin and Blue Whales with both giving excellent views and photo opportunities to a large audience. During the course of the afternoon, we encountered no less than 11 Blue Whales, 12 Fin Whales, one Minke Whale, one Sperm Whale, two Orca, three Atlantic White-sided Dolphins and a Harbour Porpoise. The birds were also interesting, with flocks of Manx Shearwaters, Great and Long-tailed Skuas, Leach's Petrels, Fulmars and Puffins all showing well on the smooth sea and an Eider duck flying over. As light failed and with the Purple Sandpiper roosting peacefully under the loungers, we reluctantly closed this fantastic watch, certainly one of the most exciting I have ever experienced. The presence of such numbers of Blue Whales in this area had not been documented before and it may be significant evidence of changes in behaviour worthy of further research.

30 August: At sea heading for Belfast. Once again we had calm seas, but a slight headwind ruffled the surface and the Purple Sandpiper appeared to have departed. Arctic and Pomarine Skuas patrolled and Fulmars, Manx Shearwaters and Gannets, together with Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Kittiwakes, suggested our proximity to



Plate 39. Lapland Bunting, Narsarsuaq. **Plate 40 (opposite)** **a.** White-tailed Eagle, Narsarsuaq. **b.** Peregrine, Belfast Lough. **c.** Greenland Wheatear. **d.** Snow Bunting, Qaqartoq. **e.** Purple Sandpiper on ship. **f.** Eider.



land. A flock of 17 Whimbrel and a single Teal flew south on their migration. We soon encountered a pod of five Pilot Whales and between 11:30 hrs and 12:30 hrs seven Northern Bottlenose Whales, two Sperm Whales and three White-sided Dolphins provided a lot of entertainment. The sightings continued throughout the afternoon with 15 Common Dolphins, two Fin Whales, two small pods of Sowerby's Beaked Whales *Mesoplodon bidens* and a single Pilot Whale together with migrating Arctic Terns and nine Black-tailed Godwits again heading south.

1 September: Approaching Belfast. The Antrim Coast was bathed in sunshine as we sailed through the North Channel accompanied by flocks of Manx Shearwaters with rafts of Guillemots, Razorbills and occasional Puffins on the sea. A single Sooty Shearwater flew by as did four Sanderling *Calidris alba*, and a juvenile Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* fed amongst the flocks of Common and Arctic Terns as we followed the channel into port. Common and Sandwich Terns were diving for fish disturbed by the ship and Cormorants roosted on the fairway buoys, while about 30 Harbour and Grey Seals rested on the muddy banks of the river. Most passengers disembarked to join excursions to Belfast or the Giant's Causeway, but I walked to the excellent RSPB Belfast Lough reserve about a mile away from the ship. The main pool held many waders including Black and Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Knot *Calidris canutus*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Redshank *Tringa tetanus* and Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* as well as Teal, Shoveller *Anas clypeata* and Mallard. This peaceful scene was soon shattered as a juvenile Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* swooped down and chased first a Lapwing, then a Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* and finally a flock of Dunlin, all without success. Meanwhile, the Curlews all stayed motionless on the ground hoping to be ignored. The Peregrine made several more sorties during the afternoon before departing over the docks. This was a suitable finale to a spectacular cruise.

Summary

This exciting cruise lived up to all my expectations, despite difficult viewing conditions during the first few days. Tom's watching from the stern whilst I watched from the bow and sides certainly increased our coverage and contact with the passengers. We saw all the species of cetacean I had hoped for with the notable addition of the Blue Whales and good views of Northern Bottlenose Whales, a total of 13 species. The seabirds also met expectations as did the few species of land birds, and our grand total was 77. On previous cruises to Greenland I have had more sightings of seals but we did manage four species. The Gyr Falcon and Blue Whales were undoubtedly the highlights for me.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Professor Tom Brereton for his expert identification and recording, as well as assisting many passengers to see and identify the whales and seabirds. Thanks too to Captain Age Danielsen, his Officers and the wonderful crew of MV *Black Watch* and the many passengers who watched with us from the outer decks. Special thanks also to Fred Olsen Cruise Lines for inviting me to be a Guest Speaker on *Black Watch*.

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Seabirds on a circumnavigation of New Zealand South Island, plans for a sub-Antarctic island odyssey

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN

(All photographs by the author)

When I discovered that half the world's albatrosses nest on the sub-Antarctic islands of Auckland, Campbell and Macquarie I knew those were places I had to visit. With a trip to New Zealand long planned this seemed an obvious trip to add on. Reading the glossy travel adverts in the bird magazines and weekend papers I found a ship that had just such a voyage planned. MV *Caledonian Sky* was set to sail from Milford Sound with a schedule that included landing on most of the New Zealand Sub-Antarctic five island groups: the Snares, Bounty Islands, Antipodes Islands, Auckland Islands and Campbell Island in the Southern Ocean south-east of New Zealand; plus Macquarie Island. We read, 'the islands, lying between the Antarctic and Subtropical Convergences and the seas, have a high level of productivity, biodiversity, wildlife population densities and endemism among birds, plants and invertebrates. There are 126 bird species in total, including 40 seabirds of which five breed nowhere else in the world.'

Among the most aesthetically appealing features of the islands are the vast congregations of wildlife, particularly penguins, during the breeding season, exactly when I planned to visit. The breeding population of Royal Penguins, a species endemic to Macquarie Island and nearby Bishop and Clerk Islets, is estimated at over 850,000 pairs, one of the greatest congregations of seabirds in the world. Such descriptions made it an easy decision to sign and go.



Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.



Plate 41. Distant Ulva Island and Iona, seen from Stewart Island.

We read the small print; got doctors' certificates of fitness, global travel insurance, visas to land on the Australian Macquarie Island, sea-boats for the 'wet landings' from Zodiaks and were ready for all the bio security checks. In the preceding weeks we did not think much about the weather, and the warm temperatures we enjoyed in the days after landing in Auckland were welcome after leaving dreary winter days in London behind. What we weren't prepared for were the storms raging across the Southern Ocean. Unpredictable at the best of times in summer, as I knew from sailing there in 2014, the cards were stacked against us. The 5m swell and 65 knot winds reported were not the conditions the ship with 90 passengers, some not so intrepid as others, would manage well, and it was announced that it was unsafe to go south. It transpired that two years earlier the ship had made a similar voyage south in heavy weather and sustained considerable damage, and that was definitely not going to be repeated.

So that is how, instead of a sub-Antarctic Island Odyssey, we came to enjoy a circumnavigation of the South Island. At very short notice the operators, and in particular Expedition Manger Cheli Larsen, put together a diverse alternative programme.

Fiordlands

After four weeks exploring the North and South Islands, my wife and I joined the MV *Caledonian Sky*, sailing from Milford Sound in failing light on 25 January. The voyage took us into parts of New Zealand's Fiordland accessible only by sea, such as Doubtful Sound, Bradshaw Sound and Dusky Sound, retracing the footsteps of James Cook as the ship anchored off Astronomer's Point and Anchor Island. We explored ashore and the islands by Zodiak.

We encountered a massive, magnificent wilderness area of rugged peaks and dense forest. Doubtful Sound is one of New Zealand's largest. It was first named Doubtful Harbour in 1770 by James Cook, who did not enter the inlet as he was uncertain whether it was navigable under sail; it was later renamed Doubtful Sound by whalers and sealers. Cruising in the Zodiaks we encountered endemics both on land and over the Sound: Bellbird, South Island Robin, NZ Pigeon and Kākā plus Pied Shag, Spotted Shag and White-fronted Tern.

Stewart Island

Positioning 120 miles overnight through the Foveaux Strait to Stewart Island we anchored in Post Office Bay, off the north shore of Ulva Island. This is a pristine forested island, managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and supported by the Ulva Island Charitable Trust as an open island sanctuary. It is one of the few predator-free sanctuaries in New Zealand. Following forest trails we enjoyed more sightings of endemics including Saddleback, Tomtit, Tui and some, but not I, enjoyed fleeting views of the Stewart Island Brown Kiwi which is smaller and less nocturnal than the other species of kiwi. The ship repositioned over lunch to Half Moon Bay for an afternoon excursion around Oban, the capital town of 390 people, where there was a gathering of 30 White-capped Albatross with a single Buller's Albatross and a couple of Stewart Island Shags.

The next day a coach trip took us to the Catlins coast - a rugged, sparsely populated area of scenic coastal landscape and dense temperate rainforest, both of which harbour many endangered species of birds, most notably the rare endemic Yellow-eyed Penguin which we did not see here, but did see at Oamaru. Waipapā Point light-house and then Curio Bay provided elevations from which I noted a raft of Sooty Shearwaters offshore. These 'mutton birds' nesting in vast colonies are still harvested and sold legally in the markets.



Plate 42. Yellow-eyed Penguin, Oamaru.

Taiaroa and nesting Northern Royal Albatross

That night we sailed for Dunedin and on the morning of the 30th were drifting off the harbour waiting for a thick blanket of fog to lift. This gave a great opportunity to see seabirds including the endemic Buller's and Hutton's Shearwaters plus Sooty Shearwater, Cape and Giant Petrel and several White-capped Albatross. The sun burnt through the fog and with a pilot on board at 9.45 we made our way up the harbour passing the colony of Northern Royal Albatross that nest on Taiaroa Head at the end of the Otago Peninsula and overlooking the mouth of the Otago Harbour.

Today the colony is around 100 strong and is the only southern hemisphere colony on an inhabited mainland. Others nest on the Chatham Islands. The species is vulnerable as although they are long lived, 40 years on average, they only nest every two years.

Visiting a hide which give very close views of nesting birds through one-way glass, we watched sitting birds panting in the 26°C heat, trying to control body temperature. From the guides we learnt about the help given to ensure the best outcome for parents and chicks. A system of water sprays has been installed to cool the birds - the water has to be brought in as there is no piped water. Supplementary feeding of chicks is done if they aren't putting on enough weight, or if a parent goes missing before the fledgling leaves.

Another hazard is fly strike; hot conditions during hatching are a major problem as adults will stand up to cool themselves, leaving the egg exposed to risk of fly strike. Albatross chicks can take six days to complete the hatch, and any fly eggs or live maggots laid in the egg during this period will often result in a dead chick. Staff now place a cotton-wool ball soaked in peppermint essence in the nest; the herb's strong aroma masks the hatching chick's smell and acts as a fly deterrent. This action has reduced fly-strike. In common with measures at all reserve areas, we saw predator traps for feral cats and mustelid control.



Plate 43. Adult Royal Albatross below colony, Taiaroa Head.



Plate 44. Sitting bird pants in the afternoon heat.



Plate 45. Northern Royal on nest, Taiaroa Head.



Plate 46. Greeting posture by arriving relief bird.

We returned here in the afternoon for a Monarch Wildlife Cruise on the sea below the colony which produced our first sightings of Little Penguins and views of New Zealand Fur Seals on the rocks. Watching the Northern Royal Albatross in flight coming in to join their mates, we noted the key identification features. The Northern Royal has a black edge to the lower mandible and also a distinct humped-back appearance. The wings are completely black, whereas the Southern Royal, which we saw later in the voyage, has white speckling on upper wing coverts with black edges and tips.

The Royal Albatross colony at Taiaroa is a major conservation effort led by the DOC and aided by volunteers. It is also a major tourist draw and attracts coach loads of visitors, which are carefully controlled by timed entry and given an informative presentation and video show before being guided up to an area where from large hides they can see, as when we visited, birds incubating eggs on the verge of hatching and birds occasionally flying past, or landing and giving a display of greeting with extended neck and bill clapping.

This year at the end of January, 22 of the 38 eggs laid had hatched. In addition to the nesting albatrosses the headland hosts a colony of 3,500 Red-billed Gulls, Otago Shags and Little Penguins in a protected area at the foot of the cliffs. Being nocturnal when coming ashore to tend young we did not see them this day.

A live video stream maybe accessed at: <https://youtu.be/WA6LeIkNI34>

Akaroa

Further north at Akaroa Harbour we saw more Little Penguins, Cape and Giant Petrel but the big attraction here were the Hector's Dolphins which are only found around the inshore waters of the South Island, with this harbour and Banks Peninsula hosting the highest population in one location. Small dolphins of up to 1.4m in length, they have a territorial range of 52 kilometres, never going far from where they are born. Our guide said that Hector's Dolphins are not too fussy about what they eat, and hunt more to the size of the prey rather than actual species. They make frequent short dives to find food, such as flounder, red cod, crabs, kahawai, mackerel and squid. We did not see birds attracted to the dolphins in the way that cetaceans in the open ocean attract petrels and shearwaters.

Kaikoura Pelagic Cruises

If there is one place in New Zealand that is mecca for seabirders it is Kaikoura. The Kaikoura Peninsula extends into the sea south of the town, and the resulting upwelling currents bring an abundance of marine life from the depths of the nearby Hikurangi Trench. The town owes its origin to this effect, since it developed as a centre for the whaling industry. Today Kaikoura is a popular tourist destination, mainly for whale watching. From a cruise on MV *Wawahia* from the South Bay marina in calm seas we saw both Sperm Whale and a family group of Orca. There is also a large colony of Fur Seals at the eastern edge of the town.

Kaikoura is also one of the best reasonably accessible places in the world to see pelagic seabirds such as albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters, including the endemic Hutton's Shearwater which nests high in Kaikoura mountains. We made two forays in search of pelagics, the first with pioneer skipper Gary Melville of Albatross Encounter on board *Encounter II* on the morning of 15 January on our southbound journey. Gary's skill in controlling speed and direction into a force 4 breeze and 1.5m swell minimised the slamming impact. Even before casting chum of frozen fish offal six

Northern Giant Petrel, Salvin's Albatross and a Northern Royal were sparring around the boat, while Cape Petrels were onlookers in this game and did not enter the fray. Our sightings list which Gary handed out once back in port included Wandering (Gibson's), Northern and Southern Royal, Salvin's and White-capped Albatrosses; Northern Giant, White-chinned, Cape and Westland Petrel; Hutton's and Sooty Shearwater; a single Arctic Skua. As we returned off the beach we saw White-fronted Terns at nests on offshore rocks and a Caspian Tern following the tide line.

Our second Albatross Encounter was in the afternoon of 1 February. The trip was cut short due to a storm that was being tracked northwards and later hit Kaikoura just as we weighed anchor and set course for the 110 mile passage to Ship Cove in the Marlborough Sounds. Our chum attracted the same species as on the earlier cruise. I suspect that the birds have learnt that the tourist boats are out twice a day with offerings.

The infrastructure of Kaikoura was heavily damaged in the November 2016 earthquake of 7.8 magnitude. The bay and surrounding region were uplifted by as much as two metres destroying the local crayfish industry, impacting the Hutton's reserve and isolating the town as the coastal highway and rail links were severed by rock falls. We saw that repair work with single file traffic continues.



Plate 47. Southern Royal (right foreground) with Northern Royals and Giant and Cape Petrels.



Plate 48. Albatross Encounter Skipper Gary Melville.



Plate 49. Salvin's Albatross off Kaikoura.

Ship Cove and James Cook

On 2 February we entered the Cook Strait and anchored in Queen Charlotte Sound, running ashore in the Zodiaks. We landed where Captain James Cook had some 250 years before, and today is the site of the Cook Monument. Cook spent a total of 328 days exploring the New Zealand coastline during his three voyages on board *Endeavour* and *Resolution* and visited Ship Cove in Queen Charlotte Sound on five separate occasions. He spent over 100 days here, as it provided safe anchorage, food and fresh water and timber for repairs to his ship. At Motuara Island we saw the cairn marking the spot where Cook, in the presence of the native chief, raised the Union flag in 1770 to take possession of the mainland in the name of King George III. The Sound was named after the King's consort Queen Charlotte. As evidenced by the NZ Robin, which would come to our feet to look for insects if one scratched the ground and disturbed the leaf litter in a land then lacking terrestrial predators, Cook would have similarly found the bird life very tame and confiding.

Australasian Gannets

We passed through strong currents around Stephen's Island and noted an Arctic Skua, Fluttering Shearwaters and several adult Gannets feeding off D'Urville Island. We saw others feeding with a gathering of Fluttering Shearwaters at the southern end of Tasman Bay. There is one large colony of Gannets on the northern corner of South Island at Farewell Spit. The thing that makes this colony unique is that it is based on sand. The others are on rock substrate habitats (Tony Whitehead, pers com). In 2011 there were over 2,000 pairs here. On the North Island our travels took us to the two other mainland ganntries. First to Muriwai, where there are over 1,200 pairs onshore and on an offshore stack. Secondly, we visited the colony at Cape Kidnappers at the south end of Hawke Bay which had 6,500 pairs. Access here was by tractor and trailer with a 9 km ride along the beach followed by a steep hike up to the Plateau Colony. The colony here is successful and growing. The DOC has erected a predator-proof



Plate 50. Australasian Gannet colony - Cape Kidnappers.

fence and created a sanctuary for the Gannets which must contribute to their success. Goats, rabbits, hares, ferrets, stoats, weasels, feral cats and hedgehogs were all introduced by early settlers. Gannets, like petrels, are very faithful to the site where they hatch. After up to five years away in Australian waters they return to find a mate and a site on which to nest. In general, the Northern Gannet is a ledge nester. The Gannets we saw at Muriwai, at the Plateau Colony of Cape Kidnappers and nearby Black Reef were nesting on relatively flat open ground. We found White-fronted Terns on the edge of the colony at Muriwai and at Black Reef.

In addition to rabbits and hares, and predators to control them, the early settlers also brought from home native birds of which we saw Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Skylark, Yellowhammer, Starling, House Sparrow, Blackbird and Song Thrush and in summer plumage a stunning pair of Redpoll.

Kapiti Island

Leaving the South Island behind we crossed the Cook Strait to the North Island and anchored early on the morning of 4 February to spend some time exploring Kapiti Island nature reserve. Once a base for whalers and then farmed with sheep, the island today has been cleared of invasive predators, and we were subjected to intense biosecurity checks after boot scrubbing and sniffer dog check to ensure we weren't harbouring mice or rats. We had precious little time to explore. I took a 270m zig-zag ascent to a feeding station that attracted the native Stitchbird and the North Island Saddleback. Maintained as a nature reserve with invasives now under control, a lot of endemics have been reintroduced. For example, we saw Red-fronted Parakeets, Stitchbird (Hihi), Weka, Kākā, North Island Robin, NZ Woodpigeon, Bellbird with young and Tui. The Brown Kiwi and Little-spotted Kiwi were released on the island between 1890 and 1910, and the island is now the stronghold for the latter species. On the trails I saw their droppings. Rat eradication has led to increases in North Island Robin, Bellbirds and Saddlebacks and the island is considered one of New Zealand's most important sites for bird recovery. On the beach below a marshy area was a colony of nesting Black-backed Gulls and more than 50 White-fronted Terns.

Passage to Milford Sound

Back on board by noon we weighed anchor and sailed for Milford Sound, a passage of 450 nm, to complete our circumnavigation. The afternoon sea watch produced 20–30 Fairy Prions.

Next day produced sightings of Buller's Shearwater, Westland's, Black-winged and Cook's Petrel; and in the afternoon two or three Grey-backed Storm-petrel in the wake.

All sea bird sightings during the *Caledonia Sky* voyage have been entered in the RNBWS data base. For scientific names and species' status as endemic or introduced see Appendix.



Plate 51. Black-winged Petrel off west coast.

Summary

We spent one month travelling by car and then joined a cruise ship for a voyage around the South Island. Listening to lectures, visiting museums and bird reserves gave an insight into the impact of the early whaling and seal hunting activities, the felling of native Kauri forest and bush burning and seeding with European grasses for grazing, all of which contributed to the decimation of endemic species. Introduction of invasive species especially possums, rats, cats and mustelids have been disastrous for ground and burrow nesting birds like kiwis and petrels. Efforts are now in hand by the DOC to eradicate these invasive species.

To find many of the New Zealand endemics today one must visit securely fenced bird reserves such as we visited: Sanctuary Mountain (Maungatautari), the Mount Bruce Wildlife Centre, Oronui Eco Sanctuary, islands in Fiordland, Stewart Island and Kapiti Island. These areas have been cleared and have in place ongoing monitoring and with baited traps. The nesting areas for Hutton's Shearwater, the ganntries and the albatrosses and penguin colonies at Taiaroa Head are all protected and managed to control predators.

Stephen Chapman
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Appendix 1. E = endemic I = introduced

Species / Scientific Name	Species / Scientific Name
Royal Penguin <i>Eudyptes schlegeli</i>	E Kākā <i>Nestor meridionalis</i>
E Southern Brown Kiwi <i>Apteryx australis</i>	E Saddleback <i>Philesturnus carunculatus</i>
E Little Spotted Kiwi <i>Apteryx owenii</i>	Silvereye <i>Zosterops lateralis</i>
Little Penguin <i>Eudyptila minor</i>	E South Island Robin <i>Petroica australis</i>
E Northern Royal Albatross <i>Diomedea sanfordi</i>	E North Island Robin <i>P. longipes</i>
E Southern Royal Albatross <i>D. epomophora</i>	E Tomtit <i>P. macrocephala</i>
Wandering/Antipodean Albatross <i>D. exulans/antipodensis</i>	I Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>
E White-capped Albatross <i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	I Song Thrush <i>T. philomelos</i>
E Salvin's Albatross <i>T. salvini</i>	E Grey Fantail <i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>
E Buller's Albatross <i>T. bulleri</i>	E Tui <i>Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae</i>
Northern Giant Petrel <i>Macronectes halli</i>	E Bellbird <i>Anthornis melanura</i>
Cape Petrel <i>Daption capense</i>	E Stitchbird <i>Notiomystis cincta</i>
E Buller's Shearwater <i>Puffinus bulleri</i>	I Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Sooty Shearwater <i>P. griseus</i>	I Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i>
E Hutton's Shearwater <i>P. huttoni</i>	I House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>
E Fluttering Shearwater <i>P. gavia</i>	I European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Common Diving-petrel <i>Pelacanoides urinatrix</i>	I Redpoll <i>C. flammea</i>
E Westland Petrel <i>Procellaria westlandica</i>	I Greenfinch <i>C. chloris</i>
Fairy Prion <i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	I European Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
E Cook's Petrel <i>Pterodroma cookii</i>	I Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Grey-backed Storm-petrel <i>Garrodia nereis</i>	I European Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Australasian Gannet <i>Morus serrator</i>	
Pied Shag <i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	Sperm Whale <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>
Little Shag <i>P. melanoleucus</i>	Bottlenose Dolphin <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
E Spotted Shag <i>Stictocarbo punctatus</i>	E Hector's Dolphin <i>Cephalorhynchus hectori</i>
E Stewart Island Shag <i>Leucocarbo chalconotus</i>	Orca <i>Orcinus orca</i>
E Weka <i>Gallirallus australis</i>	
E Variable Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus unicolor</i>	E New Zealand Fur Seal <i>Arctocephalus forsteri</i>
E South Island Pied Oystercatcher <i>H. longirostris</i>	I European Rabbit <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Arctic Skua <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	I European Hare <i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Black-backed Gull <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	I Stoat <i>Mustela erminea</i>
Red-billed Gull <i>L. novaehollandiae</i>	I Ferret <i>Mustela putorius</i>
White-fronted Tern <i>Sterna striata</i>	I Feral Cat <i>Felis catus</i>
Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	I Stoat <i>Mustela erminea</i>
E New Zealand Pigeon <i>Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae</i>	I Hedgehog <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>
E Red-crowned Parakeet <i>Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae</i>	



Plate 52. Spirit of Enderby. © D Brown

Birding in the sub-Antarctic islands of Australasia

by Keith Betton

(All photographs by the author except where indicated)

It is a sad fact that almost every location around the world is now busier with humans than it was two hundred years ago, but one exception is the Subantarctic Islands which used to be visited by whalers but now are one of most difficult areas to explore. Unlike Antarctica, the whalers have not been replaced by tourists, and with a few exceptions most of these islands are only visited by research vessels.

While the Chatham Islands have air connections with New Zealand the others are all rarely-visited UNESCO World Heritage sites - that is the Snares, Bounty, Antipodes, Auckland, Campbell and Macquarie. Unless you are a Government researcher all are almost impossible to reach, and the only way to see them is to join the annual cruise organised by the New Zealand cruise line Heritage Expeditions. This is one of the must-do trips for any world birder and I decided to join the 2018 expedition.

The company's fully ice-strengthened expedition vessel *The Spirit of Enderby* was built in 1984 for polar and oceanographic research around Russian waters and is perfect for this birding expedition. She carries just 50 passengers and provides relatively comfortable accommodation. On board there is a lounge bar with a library well-stocked with wildlife books, there is a dedicated lecture room and given the small number of passengers there is a real chance for everyone to spend as much time visiting the islands as possible. However, the waters between New Zealand and Antarctica are often very rough, so the exciting itinerary is entirely in the lap of the weather gods, and on most trips at least one leg of the journey has to be modified to ensure passenger safety. But given that, more than 40 seabird species breed around these islands, so it is a small price to pay.



Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.

Here is the itinerary. I will summarise the main birding highlights by each island.

- Nov 12: Depart from Bluff
- Nov 13: The Snares - North East I
- Nov 14: Auckland Islands - Enderby I
- Nov 15: Auckland Is - Carnley Hbr
- Nov 16: At Sea
- Nov 17: Macquarie Island
- Nov 18: At Sea
- Nov 19: At Sea
- Nov 20: Campbell Island
- Nov 21: At Sea
- Nov 22: Antipodes Islands
- Nov 23: Bounty Islands
- Nov 24: At Sea and Pyramid Rock
- Nov 25: Chatham Islands - Waitangi
- Nov 26: South East I and Mangere Is
- Nov 27: At Sea
- Nov 28: At Sea
- Nov 29: Arrive at Dunedin

My journey started on 12 November in Bluff and soon after sailing we encountered Little Penguins and Black-billed Gulls in the harbour and Sooty Shearwaters as we moved further into the Strait. The first albatrosses started to appear including Salvin's Albatross and the White-capped form of Shy Albatross, while Fairy Prions and Cape Petrels made their first appearances.

13 November: Snares Islands. These are a small group of uninhabited islands lying about 119 nm to the SSW of Bluff and consist of the main North East Island and the smaller Broughton Island as well as the Western Chain Islands. Collectively, the Snares have a total land area of just 3.5 sq km. The only way to see the Snares islands is by Zodiac and on most recent trips the sea has been too rough for that - but we were lucky and were able to head close into shore along the eastern side of the island. The raucous calls of Snares Penguins could be heard all around us - birds arriving and departing, and several colonies along the rocky shore and small hills covered in boulders. We were able to approach within a few metres of the birds, obtaining outstanding views. Nobody can land on these islands but we were still able to see a pair of Tomtits, quickly followed by a New Zealand Fernbird - endemic Snares races in both cases.

14–15 November: Auckland Islands. The next day we arrived at the Auckland Islands lying 147 nm S of the Snares. The main island, occupying 510 sq km, is surrounded by seven smaller islands but our expedition was to be to Enderby Island measuring 4 km by 2 km. It was cleared of introduced cattle, rabbits and rats in 1994, and as a result the amount of wildlife has grown fast. Even before most people had set foot on the island one of the tougher endemics, Auckland Teal, had revealed itself with a pair feeding in the shallow western edge of Sandy Bay, close to our landing spot. The island is covered in tussock grass and Rata forest but a boardwalk allows for easy and eco-friendly progress to the main birding hotspots. The furtive Auckland Island race of Subantarctic Snipe hid very well but was seen nevertheless. The local race of New Zealand Pipit proved common and confiding; Red-crowned Parakeets were less easy to pin down. On the south side of the island a handful of Yellow-eyed Penguins showed well and at the edge of the scrub Southern Royal Albatrosses were breeding, with birds taking advantage of the winds to cruise effortlessly past us. At the end of the boardwalk we located a trio of incubating Light-mantled Albatrosses braving the wind and rain to keep their eggs warm. As we cruised back to the ship we took in the cliffs to get close views of Auckland Shag.

The next day the ship continued south and into Carnley Harbour, an ancient flooded caldera and sheltered area of water, and we climbed a steep and heavily vegetated slope to a Shy (White-capped) Albatross colony. Taking a Zodiac cruise later we had excellent views of many Auckland Teal and Auckland Shags while Tomtits foraged along the rocks and after a bit of searching a pair of Red-crowned Parakeets were also found.

Sailing SW towards Macquarie Island we were kept busy on deck with a plethora of seabirds - good numbers of Antipodean Albatross (of the Gibson's form as well as Campbell), and Black-browed Albatrosses. Antarctic Prions and White-headed Petrels started to become more evident while Mottled Petrel maintained a good presence. Smaller species such as Grey-backed Storm-Petrels and Subantarctic Little Shearwaters also started to become more noticeable.

17 November: Macquarie Island. Macquarie Island lies 347 nm SW of the Auckland Islands and is politically a part of Tasmania, Australia. It is a long thin island from north to south covering 128 sq km. The Australian Antarctic Division maintains a permanent base on the isthmus at the northern end of the island at the foot of Wireless Hill - our Zodiacs landed on the nearest beach to the base and immediately we had to avoid Elephant Seals hauled out nearby. The bird interest here included small numbers of Gentoo Penguins, Macquarie Shags and Southern Rockhopper Penguins. Later we travelled to Sandy Bay which was one of the greatest spectacles of the trip. The shore was covered in King Penguins that looked up at us as they waddled past and there were thousands of Royal Penguins in a colony on a huge scrape in the nearby tussock grass. The next day we headed to Lusitania Bay to see the 100,000 King Penguins on the beach, although the weather prevented us from making a close approach. The Australian Government has recently declared Macquarie to be free from rats after poison baits had been scattered across the whole island by helicopter.

20 November: Campbell Island. Campbell Island is mountainous up to 500m and covers 112 square kilometres. It is surrounded by numerous stacks, rocks and islets and lies 387 nm NE of Macquarie Island. Once again rats have been eliminated with the result that birds have returned to their former habitats. Perhaps the most impressive example is the Campbell Island form of the Subantarctic Snipe which had retreated solely to a small islet but has now returned - despite being close to flightless. They can now be heard calling in many places. This is also the most important breeding area of the Southern Royal Albatross and after a Zodiac cruise around the coast of Perseverance Harbour to look at Campbell Teal and Campbell Shag we made a half day landing to explore the heavily vegetated hillsides on which they nest. A boardwalk ensures that human impact on the habitat is minimised, although careful approaches towards nesting birds are allowed. The experience of sharing the space with these birds remains one of my favourite memories of the entire trip.

22 November: Antipodes Islands. The Antipodes Islands lie 301 nm NE of Campbell Island and consist of Antipodes Island itself at 20 sq km plus the much smaller Bollons Island and numerous small islets and stacks. The birdlife around these islands was noticeably busy with Antipodean and Black-browed Albatrosses, many prions, Subantarctic Shearwaters plus Grey, Giant, White-chinned, White-headed and Cape Petrels - together with small rafts of the eagerly anticipated Erect-crested Penguin. This was one of our most challenging Zodiac launches with a swell of up to 8 metres up and down the kelp-encrusted rock walls. Taking care we managed to approach the Erect-crested Penguins standing on rock platforms, while above small groups of Reischek's and Antipodes Parakeets could be seen in the mossy clumps on the rocks.



23 November: Bounty Islands. The Bounty Islands are a small group of 13 granite islets with a combined area of just 135 ha lying 115 nm N of the Antipodes Islands. Once again there was quite a swell combined with a heavy sea mist, but gradually the mist cleared to reveal parts of Penguin, Depot and Spider Islands and again we headed off in the Zodiacs to investigate. Here we were able to get closer to Erect-crested Penguins that were in small groups on the sea. Fulmar Prions fluttered right next to us and Salvin's Albatrosses cruised by before heading up to their nests on the cliffs - the Bounties are the chief breeding ground for this species. Meanwhile all around us Bounty Shags swam and dived for fish.

24–25 November: Chatham Islands. A further 294 nm to the NE we reached the Chatham Islands, 432 nm E of the South Island of New Zealand. I had always imagined these to be inaccessible, but actually there are flights to three New Zealand cities from the regional centre of Waitangi. As we approached the islands our Captain took a route to allow us to circle around Pyramid Rock which is 9 km S of Pitt Island (the most southerly of the group). As the name suggests, this pointed rock juts out of the sea and covers less than 0.1 sq km but is the only natural nesting site of around 5,300 pairs of Chatham Albatrosses. The birds have solved the potential problem of eggs rolling off the rock or getting too cold by building mud pedestal nests, glued firmly to the rock. After this we cruised in the lee of the South East Islands to look for endemics including the Chatham form of the Red-crowned Parakeet, Shore Plover, Pitt Shag and the Chatham race of the Tomtit. We heard but could not see the Chatham Island Snipe. Sadly there was no sighting of the Black Robin which numbered just five in 1980, but have now increased to 250 thanks to hard work from conservationists.

The next day we landed in Waitangi town itself and transferred to the south coast in order to visit the Tuku Reserve, a private community-run project. The team there have fenced off an entire gully and stream down to the sea and they maintain 45 km of traplines to control rats, possums and cats. As a result they have managed to reintroduce Chatham Island race of the Tui to the reserve and there are large flocks of Chatham Pigeons breeding. In addition we were able to see Chatham Gerygone and the Chatham form of the New Zealand Fantail. The rare Magenta Petrel breeds on these hillsides as well but access to their nests is strictly controlled (see report in *Sea Swallow* 63, 4–9). As we waited to board the Zodiacs again a Chatham Oystercatcher put in an appearance on the beach and a small group of Chatham Shags were viewed on a nearby cliff. But before heading back to the New Zealand the Captain moved the ship into the Pitt Strait on the south coast to chum and scan the seas for sightings of the elusive Magenta Petrel. Expeditions in recent years have enjoyed around a 50% success rate in seeing this bird maybe once or twice - but in total we managed ten sightings of probably three individuals; no previous expedition had seen this many. With just 50 nesting pairs known of, this is easily the world's rarest seabird.

26 November: Mangere Island. We awoke to find the ship anchored in the lee of Pitt Island and without wasting time the Zodiacs were launched and we headed for Mangere Island Wildlife Sanctuary in hope of seeing the Chatham Islands Parakeet. Despite a strong swell the birds were easily seen feeding upon the flowering flax. This was also another opportunity to see Pitt Shags up close. Once again we had a chance

Plate 53 **a.** Auckland Teal. **b.** Campbell Teal. **c.** King Penguins. **d.** King Penguins. **e.** Bounty Islands. **f.** Royal Penguin. **g.** Royal Penguin. **h.** Snares Penguin. **i.** Erect-crested Penguin.

to see the Black Robin, but with plenty of vegetation to choose from there was little reason for these birds to come to the shore. By mid-afternoon we had set a course for Dunedin, two and a half days away.

27–29 November: at sea. High numbers of Grey-faced Petrels dominated the early part of our journey with increasing numbers of Cook's Petrels. Another Magenta Petrel was seen and as we moved nearer to New Zealand, Hutton's and Buller's Shearwaters started to appear and a few people managed to see a Westland Petrel, but sadly the tour was coming to an end.

Since our start at Bluff 17 days previously we had visited seven groups of islands, undertaken thirteen Zodiac cruises and travelled more than 2,440 nm.

Notes on selected species

Auckland Teal *Anas aucklandica*: At least 20 seen very well on Enderby Island in the Aucklands. This flightless form, which is confined to seven of the smaller islands in the Aucklands group, is now usually considered a full species. The total population is estimated at between 600 and 2,000 individuals. It is classified as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International because of the constant risk of introduced predators.

Campbell Teal *Anas nesiotis*: Eight seen at Campbell Island in Perseverance Bay. At one time believed to be extinct, the Campbell Teal was rediscovered on tiny Dent Island in 1975. Following successful conservation efforts, the population is now thought to include between 100 and 200 mature individuals, which has led BirdLife International to downlist its conservation status from 'Critical' to 'Endangered'.

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*: Close views of several hundred birds at Sandy Bay on Macquarie. We also had distant views of the enormous colony at Lusitania Bay, where there are between 100,000 and 200,000 birds. The total population on Macquarie is estimated at about 300,000 individuals and increasing.

Yellow-eyed Penguin *Megadyptes antipodes*: About eight seen on Enderby I, with a further three on Campbell I. Listed as 'Endangered' by BirdLife International. The total population is estimated at only around 4,000 individuals, including 520–570 pairs in the Auckland Islands and 490–600 pairs on Campbell Island.

Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*: Superb views in the small colony at the base on Macquarie. It is classified as 'Near Threatened' by BirdLife International.

Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor*: Great views in the Chathams.

Southern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome*: Seen in the Auckland Islands, near the base on Macquarie and in the Antipodes. The subspecies here is *filholi* which shows bare pink skin at the base of the bill. Some authorities (such as HBW) consider this to be a separate species which they call Eastern Rockhopper Penguin. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International.

Snares Penguin *Eudyptes robustus*: Excellent views during our Zodiac cruise in the Snares. This species is restricted to the Snares, where the population is thought to be stable at about 46,500 birds. It is listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International because of the possible effects of climate change on food supply and the possibility that introduced predators might one day reach the islands.

Erect-crested Penguin *Eudyptes sclateri*: Several hundred birds seen in the Antipodes and Bounty Islands. This species is confined to the Antipodes and Bounty groups, and is thought to number about 154,000 individuals. It is listed as 'Endangered' by BirdLife International.

Royal Penguin *Eudyptes schlegeli*: Thousands of birds at the Sandy Bay colony on Macquarie Island. It has been estimated that one million pairs breed on the island. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International.

Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*: A single in among the Royal Penguins at Sandy Bay on Macquarie Island had us confused at first — thinking it might just be a dark Royal — but it was confirmed, nearly 6000 km away from its nearest breeding grounds on the Kerguélen Islands.

Antipodean Albatross Group: The next two forms are considered by some to be species in their own right or races of a larger Wandering Albatross group.

Antipodean form of Antipodean Albatross *Diomedea antipodensis antipodensis*: Small numbers noted on five days, with up to 10 near the Antipodes. A 2007 population estimate numbered between 4,635 and 5,757 breeding pairs on Antipodes Island, and 10 pairs on Campbell Island.

Gibson's form of Antipodean Albatross *Diomedea antipodensis gibsoni*: Sightings on four days, with up to 15 seen. The global population is about 40,000 birds, with some 10,000 breeding pairs estimated in 1999 in the Auckland Islands.

Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*: Singles seen on four days near Macquarie Island and as we left the Chatham Islands. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International. The total population is estimated to be 8,500 pairs, mostly on South Georgia. Locally 10 pairs nest at Macquarie Island.

Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*: The commonest of the great albatrosses seen during the trip. It was recorded on virtually every day at sea except in the far south. The best were the birds on Campbell Island where we had an opportunity to sit and watch these magnificent birds at very close quarters. The total population of this species is estimated at 8,200–8,600 pairs, most of which breed on Campbell Island with just small numbers on Enderby, Auckland and Adams islands in the Auckland group. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International.

Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*: Recorded on eight days, with up to 15 around the Chathams. Most of the population of 6,500–7,000 pairs breeds on islands in the Chatham group. Listed as 'Endangered' by BirdLife International.

Campbell Albatross *Thalassarche impavida*: Recorded on 11 days. The largest numbers were recorded in the region of Campbell Island where the entire population of some 19,000–26,000 pairs breeds. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International.

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*: Small numbers seen on nine days. The world population estimated at 680,000 pairs, 90% of which breed in the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. Listed as 'Near threatened'.



Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*: Small numbers noted on 8 days between Auckland and Campbell Islands. This species, of which about 100 pairs breed on Macquarie, is listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International. The world population is estimated at around 250,000 adults.

Shy Albatross Group: This species contains two forms - only one of which was seen. These are sometimes treated as species in their own right.

White-capped form of Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta steadi*: The most common albatross seen, particularly on our first few days at sea and up to 150 being recorded in a day around the Snares and Auckland Islands. Most of the population breeds in the Auckland Islands, where there are 70,000–80,000 pairs on Disappointment, 3,000 pairs on the main island and 100 pairs on Adams. The long hike up to the breeding colony at Southwest Cape was well worth the effort.

Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini*: Seen on nine days. We found around 10 around the Snares, where about 650 pairs breed, but the best encounters with this species were in the Bounty Islands, where we had excellent views of many thousands at their main breeding colony. 'Chumming' from the stern of the ship as we left the Bounties also gave us some incredible views. We found good numbers of birds as we cruised south-west from the Chatham Islands towards Dunedin. The breeding population in the Bounty Islands was estimated at 30,750 pairs in 1998. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by BirdLife International.

Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita*: We had brilliant views of thousands of birds as we circumnavigated the breeding colony on Pyramid Rock. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The entire world population is now 5,300 pairs.

Buller's Albatross Group: This species contains two forms. These are sometimes treated as species in their own right.

Buller's form of Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri bulleri*: Small numbers were noted around the Snares Islands. Listed as 'Vulnerable'. There are about 11,500 pairs of this southern form in the Snares and Solander Islands.

Pacific form of Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri platei*: Up to 50 a day around the Chathams. These birds belong to the northern form which has been proposed as a separate species. Listed as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. There are about 18,000 pairs of the northern form in the Chatham Islands.

Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata*: Seen on nine days. We had great views of birds on the nest on Enderby Island and in noisy display flight around the crags above the landing site on Campbell Island. Listed as 'Near threatened'.

Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*: Fairly common throughout the cruise.

Plate 54 a. Southern Royal Albatross. **b.** Salvin's Albatross. **c.** Northern Royal Albatross. **d.** Salvin's Albatross. **e.** In the Zodiac surrounded by seabirds. © D Brown **f.** Light-mantled Albatross. **g.** Chatham Albatross. **h.** Pacific form of Buller's Albatross. **i.** Brown Skua.

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*: Seen on six days. Fairly common on Macquarie Island.

Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*: Two at sea as we left Macquarie Island.

Cape Petrel *Daption capense*: Common and widespread.

Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*: Small numbers on four days in the deep south.

Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*: Recorded on seven days, near Chathams.

Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*: Seen on seven days. Common in the south with numbers in the low thousands between Macquarie and the Antipodes Islands.

Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*: Seen on 11 days. The commonest prion except in the southernmost areas.

Fulmar Prion *Pachyptila crassirostris*: Small numbers on nine days and then hundreds around the Bounties.

Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*: A single near the Bounty Islands.

Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata*: Seen on 12 days in small numbers.

Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii*: Recorded on six days, with a max of 10 birds.

Grey-faced Petrel *Pterodroma gouldi*: Seen on seven days in the last stretch of the tour with 30 seen en route to the Chatham Islands.

Magenta Petrel *Pterodroma magenta*: Nine sightings off mainland Chatham.

White-headed Petrel *Pterodroma lessonii*: Good numbers seen on seven days.

Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*: Small numbers seen on 12 days.

Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*: Seen between the Antipodes and Chatham Is.

White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*: Common, except in far south.

Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica*: A single between Chatham Is and NZ.

Buller's Shearwater *Puffinus bulleri*: Eight seen on the last day of the trip.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*: Fairly common and widespread.

Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*: Noted on five days, with nine seen.

Hutton's Shearwater *Puffinus huttoni*: Around 10 seen on our last day at sea.

Subantarctic Shearwater *Puffinus elegans*: Small numbers seen on nine days.

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* Around 25 seen on five days.

Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis* Up to 10 seen daily on 14 days.

White-faced Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma marina* Common around the Chathams.

Black-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta tropica* Moderate numbers seen on 12 days.

Common Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*: Fairly common and widespread.

Pitt Shag *Phalacrocorax featherstoni*: Good views on cruise off South East Island.

Spotted Shag *Phalacrocorax punctatus*: Several seen in Bluff Harbour.

Bronze Shag *Leucocarbo chalconatus*: Several seen in Bluff Harbour.

Chatham Shag *Leucocarbo onslowi*: Six birds at South East Island.

Campbell Shag *Leucocarbo campbelli*: Around 10 seen on Campbell Island.

Auckland Shag *Leucocarbo colensoi*: Great views around Enderby Island.

Bounty Shag *Leucocarbo ranfurlyi*: Around 100 seen in the Bounties.

Macquarie Shag *Leucocarbo purpurascens*: Seen well on Macquarie Island.

Chatham Oystercatcher *Haematopus chathamensis*: Three seen at Waitangi.

Shore Dotterel *Thinornis novaeseelandiae*: 10+ seen on SE and Mangere Islands.

Chatham Snipe *Coenocorypha pusilla*: Heard on S E Island and Mangere Island.

Subantarctic Snipe *Coenocorypha aucklandica*: Great views of race *aucklandica* on Enderby Island and race *perseverance* on Campbell Island.

Plate 55. Pyramid Rock, Chatham Islands.





Red-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus scopulinus*: Seen on eight days over the trip.

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*: Fairly common on all the island groups.

White-fronted Tern *Sterna striata*: Seen in the Snares and the Chathams.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*: A single in the Bounty Islands.

Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*: Recorded on most island groups.

Brown Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus*: Moderate numbers seen throughout.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*: Four seen on three days in the Chatham Is.

Chatham Pigeon *Hemiphaga chathamensis*: At least 10 in the Tuku reserve.

Red-crowned Parakeet *Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae*: Three of the nominate race on Enderby Island and at least 10 of the *chathamensis* race on the Chatham Is.

Reischek's Parakeet *Cyanoramphus hochstetteri*: Five seen on Antipodes Island.

Antipodes Parakeet *Cyanoramphus unicolor*: At least eight on Antipodes Island.

Chatham Islands Parakeet *Cyanoramphus forbesi*: Around 20 on Mangere I.

Tui *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*: Two of the nominate race on Enderby Island and small numbers of the of the *chathamensis* race in the Chathams.

New Zealand Bellbird *Anthornis melanura*: Seen in the Auckland Islands.

Chatham Gerygone *Gerygone albofrontata*: A few birds seen in the Tuku reserve.

New Zealand Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*: A few seen in the Tuku reserve.

Tomtit *Petroica macrocephala*: The distinctive all-black *dannefaerdi* race was seen in the Snares, while the *marrineri* were seen in the Aucklands and the *chathamensis* race in the Chathams. Some of these may be split off in the future.

New Zealand Fernbird *Megalurus punctatus*: Several of the race *caudatus* were seen very well in the Snares. A future split?

New Zealand Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*: Several subspecies occur on the island groups visited and some may be split in the future - *aucklandicus* in the Aucklands and Campbell I, *chathamensis* in the Chathams and *steindachneri* in the Antipodes.

Keith Betton
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Plate 56 **a.** Campbell Shag. **b.** Bounty Shag. **c.** Pitt Shag. **d.** Macquarie Shag **e.** Shore Dotterel © D Brown. **f.** Campbell form of Subantarctic Snipe. **g.** Chatham Oystercatcher. © D Brown **h.** Campbell Island form of New Zealand Pipit. **i.** Antipodes Parakeet.

Ecuador birding, October 2017

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

(All photographs by the author)

A piece in *Sea Swallow* 67 describes how a group of friends, including four RNBWS members, planned a two-week trip of a lifetime to the Galápagos. And without needing much persuasion, a ten-day visit to Ecuador was added, on the basis that “having travelled so far it won’t cost much more...”. This article attempts to give a flavour of a trip which was birding-focused but with wider natural history appeal.

Ecuador is a remarkable country for birding because although relatively small, at less than half the size of France and only 1.5% of South America, it has a very wide range of habitats and therefore a huge diversity of bird species. Named for the Equator, on which it sits, Ecuador has a fertile, coastal plain in the west, cloud forest on the western slopes of the Andes, high Páramo above 3,000m and a substantial area of tropical rain forest in the Amazon basin. The result is almost 1,600 bird species and a field guide that weighs 1.6kg!

We arrived at Quito by various routes, through the USA or Spain as there is no direct flight from the UK, to experience one obvious fact: Quito is high. Indeed at 2,850m it one of the highest capitals in the world (the highest is La Paz at 3,640m), and high enough for most of us to feel the effects. Our arrival was staggered, with one couple spending 24 hours on the trail — successfully — of spectacled bears whilst Moira and I spent a couple of days even higher up around the Cotopaxi volcano. A map showing the three main areas we visited is at Fig 1.



Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.

Cotopaxi

The Cotopaxi National Park sits around the volcano and is a good example of Páramo, mostly open grassland and occasional lakes at about 3,800m. We spent a couple of hours walking in very pleasant conditions but we certainly felt the altitude as soon as the path started to rise. The main feature, besides the volcano, is the Laguna de Limpiopungo and while circumnavigating the lake we saw a number of waders including Baird’s Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* — new to me — and local specialities such as Andean Teal *Anas andium* and Andean Coot *Fulica ardesiaca*. Of greatest interest to this RNBWS member, of course, were excellent views of a number of Andean Gulls,



Plate 57. Carunculated Caracara.



Plate 58. Black-tailed Trainbearer.

Chroicocephalus serranus sp. These are perhaps amongst the strangest of gulls as they breed solely at high altitude (up to 4,000m) and the majority of the world's population never see the sea. Raptors were relatively scarce but we did have nice views of a Cinereous Harrier *Circus cinereus* and frequent encounters with the characterful local Carunculated Caracaras *Phalcoboenus carunculatus*. Our overnight stay was at a charming converted convent nearby with beautiful views, llamas loose in the garden and our first hummingbirds with Black-tailed Trainbearers *Lesbia victoriae* clearly visible amongst the flower beds.

Back in Quito, we met up with the other three couples and after a day exploring this handsome colonial city, one of the very first UNESCO World Heritage Sites, we set off early in the morning for the Andean cloud forest and the Bella Vista Forest Lodge.

Cloud Forest

The western slopes of the Andes are amongst the most bio-diverse environments in the world and species identification always starts with the altitude at which it is found. There are many species of hummingbird, for example and they come in three distinct groups of 'low', 'medium' and 'high' habitats. We managed 34 different hummingbird species in Ecuador, all of which were exquisite if you could focus your binoculars fast enough to catch them. I was particularly taken by the Giant Sapphirwing *Pterophanes cyanopterus*, the Buff-winged Starfrontlet *Coeligena lutetiae*, tiny Purple-throated Woodstar *Calliphlox mitchellii* and the extraordinary Sword-billed Hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* whose bill is longer than its body and tail together.



Plate 59. Giant Sapphirwing.



Plate 60. Buff-winged Starfrontlet.



Plate 61. Hummingbird montage.

I hope the photo-montage gives some idea. Walking around the Bella Vista area we saw many delightful tanagers, barbets and toucanets, and at dusk, a single, backlit, Crested Quetzal *Pharomachrus antisianus*. The second evening at the lodge also brought a pleasant surprise as the bananas hanging from the tree beside the dining area attracted a local celebrity animal, an Olinguito *Bassaricyon neblina*. Somewhat like a Kinkajou, this rare mammal of the Racoon family was new to science in 2013 when it was described by zoologists staying at Bella Vista.



Plate 62. Red-rumped Toucanet.

The final morning was an early start in order to reach a lek site for Andean Cock-of-the-Rock *Rupicola peruvianus*. My previous experience of lekking sites comes from Scotland and some gloomy, distant and generally underwhelming views of Black Grouse *Lyrurus tetrix*. My expectations were therefore relatively low and I was delighted when the Cocks-of-the-Rock arrived and started performing. There were perhaps 20 male birds, all jumping about, making a racket and putting on a real show only 20 or 30m from us. And of course, with their incredible red plumage and huge crests, they are the antithesis of an LBJ. After such a spectacular start to the day, it was only fitting that we should move to the Paz reserve and spend a couple of hours on the trail of the six local species of Antpitta *Glariidae*. Despite their skulking habit, they proved rather endearing birds and we were pleased to see all six. We paused during our journey back to Quito with a visit to a 'low' altitude botanical garden and another set of new hummingbird species before stopping to admire the Equator monument, amusingly, according to GPS, set about 100m off the actual line.

Amazon Rain Forest

After a further night in Quito, fortunately a city with many good restaurants, we returned to the airport for the short flight of about 180 km, mostly downhill, to Coca. This regional city sits on the Napo river, a major tributary of the Amazon, at a more comfortable elevation of only 300m. The river here is wide and an important transport route although the size of the continent became apparent when we learned that it was over 2,000 km to the sea. Our destination was the Napo wildlife centre within the Yasuni National Park, Ecuador's largest. The journey came in two stages. The first was aboard a high speed motor boat which carried the eight of us with half a dozen others downstream at about 25 knots for two hours. Despite the wind, spray and occasional rain, we managed to keep birding and our guide found us an Amazonian Umbrellabird *Cephalopterus ornatus* while I was pleased to remember my RNBWS roots and photograph a pair of Large-billed Terns *Phaetusa simplex* as well as a number of Yellow-billed Tern *Sternula superciliaris*. After travelling 60 km or so, we landed on a large sand bar and in the wellingtons provided walked across the bar to our next boats.



Plate 63. Crested Quetzal.



Plate 64. Andean Cock-of-the-rock.



Plate 65. Large-billed Tern.

The second phase of the journey was by hand-paddled canoe up the creek to Lake Anagucocha and our lodge. No petrol engines are allowed in the reserve so these canoes were the only form of transport for the next four days. The trip up the creek took something over two hours, in part because we stopped from time to time to observe the wildlife. On that first creek trip, the Anaconda coiled on the bank, the black caiman in the lagoon and the relatively common but splendid Hoatzin *Opisthocomus hoazin* (aka "Stinky Turkey") really set the scene. Our lodge was completely isolated in the rain forest and was the most remarkable place in which to stay. It is owned and operated by the local Anangu Quinchua Indians, a remarkable community who have turned themselves from hunter-gatherers to conservationists and guides within little more than one generation. They were excellent hosts and expert guides who seemed to know every tree, plant, bird and animal. The lodge was very comfortable and, remarkably, mosquito free. Apparently the lake water is made acid by the rotting leaves of a common tree and the PH is just too low to support them.

Our days at Napo were spent touring by canoe and on foot visiting many sites including salt licks on the main river banks for the many parrot species and climbing canopy viewing towers. It was tiring at times but never dull and we were very pleased to have chosen to stay four nights at the lodge, a little longer than most visitors. Animal highlights included Giant Otters *Pteronura brasiliensis* in the lake and creek, porcupines and Golden-mantled Tamarins *Saguinus tripartitus* amongst the many monkey species. Our scariest encounter was with an adult Fer de Lance *Bothrops asper*, fortunately on the river bank but only a metre or so from our canoe paddler who was not happy! The Red-tailed Boa *Boa constrictor*, on the other hand, was of less concern and allowed me to photograph it on my phone.

The birds were of course remarkable. We saw 11 parrot species, including Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao* and Blue-and-yellow Macaw *Ara ararauna*, seven toucans, trogons, oropendolas, barbets, and many more. Some were quite hard to find and many would have been tricky to identify but our local guide was simply one of the best I've had on any trip, anywhere.



Plate 66. Hoatzin.



Plate 67. Red-tailed Boa.



Plate 68. Giant Hummingbird.



Plate 69. Vermillion Flycatcher.

Finale

We left Napo having had an extraordinary and memorable set of experiences but any risk of feeling low was offset by the knowledge that we would be off to the Galápagos the next day. However, we arrived at Quito airport around midday and decided that we could squeeze in an unscheduled extra trip. We went straight from the airport to Antisana, a valley between volcanos to the southeast of the city. Our minibus journey took much longer than expected as we became involved in a large horse festival in a town at the entrance to the valley. The roads were filled with whole families of horsemen in traditional dress; a very striking sight and well worth the delay. So it was at about 16:00 hrs that we arrived at a delightful guest house and restaurant for a late lunch. We were slow to sit down inside, though, as from the veranda we were able to enjoy splendid, close views of Giant Hummingbird *Patagona gigas* and distant but clear views of a family of Andean Condors *Vultur gryphus*. After all the wonders we had enjoyed in the previous ten days, the Condors were a fitting finale.

After another night in Quito, we were back at the airport for our flight to the Galápagos via Guayaquil. The mainland phase had been a great success and we were very pleased that we had chosen to extend our trip. We had had a significant helping of Ecuadorian culture and some marvellous birding experiences with excellent guides in fascinating habitats. We hadn't, perhaps, done justice to all 1,600 species in the weighty field guide but we had seen 278, of which 265 were new to me. It was a very good trip indeed and I recognise how fortunate we were to have had such good advice and assistance when planning it.¹ And as a postscript, on our way home, we had a night in a pleasant hacienda not far from Quito and added one of the birds we had glimpsed in Galápagos. The very handsome Vermillion Flycatcher *Pyrocephalus rubinus* was a good bird on which to end.

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¹ Our trip was organised by Reef and Rainforest of Totnes and their Ecuador specialist, John Melton, the son of a naval officer and friend of the RNBWS.

From Sabine's Gulls to Snowcap

by Simon Cook

(All photographs by the author)

This is a report about a long but varied cruise ship voyage from Nassau to Punta Arenas, 3 Oct–10 Nov 2018. From a wildlife point of view it had everything: landbirds at sea, lots of seabirds and marine mammals, and landbirds on shore excursions. These last are not reported here but mention must be made of Snowcap *Microchera albocoronata* (a hummingbird) and Burrowing Parrot *Cyanoliseus patagonus*, both new birds for me. We got off to a good start, for on our first night at sea I checked the decks for birds and discovered a Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* at 02.35. Later in the day Brown and Masked Boobies *Sula leucogaster* and *S. dactylatra*, and a male Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* were seen.

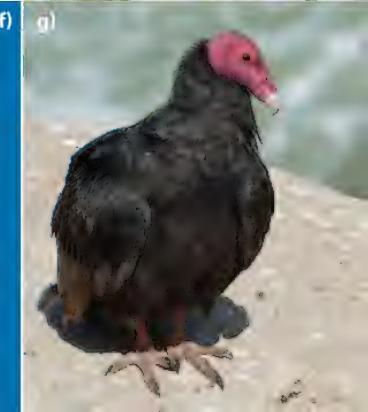
Next day the ship was off SE Cuba, heading for Santiago de Cuba. A deck check between 03.45 and 05.45 revealed many small birds flying around the ship and about 150 actually on board: Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*, Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*, Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilla varia*, Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*, American Redstart *S. ruticilla*, Palm Warbler *S. palmarum*, Magnolia Warbler *S. magnolia*, Prairie Warbler *S. discolor*, Bay-breasted Warbler *S. castanea* and my first onboard Cape May Warblers *S. tigrina*.

At 04:00 hrs on the 7th we were about 45 nm miles east of Havana, with rain and ESE wind at 22 knots. To quote from my notebook, “Tens of thousands flying around and past the ship, low hundreds aboard - 99% warblers. Started getting light at 06:45 hrs and by 07:00 hrs virtually all the birds had gone. Another amazing blizzard of birds!” Amongst 16 species of warblers were at least five Worm-eating Warblers *Helmitheros vermivorum* and other birds included Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*, Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea*, Green Heron *Butorides virescens* and Gray Kingbird *Tyrannus dominicensis*. Later, a Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon* flew over the ship and I was called upon to catch with my rock pool net various birds that had found their way inside the ship.

On the 11th the ship stopped at Cayman Brac, en route to Colombia. Migrants here were mainly shorebirds and included Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* and Least and Western Sandpipers *Calidris minutilla* and *C. mauri*. There was also a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* atop a radio mast and close views were had of Brown Boobies on the limestone cliffs. Unlike previous years, the passage to Colombia was very quiet, with just American Redstart and Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens* on board and no Peregrines at all. On the way we passed over the Cayman Trench, which is over 6,000 metres deep, and where interest came in the form of about 20 Bottlenose Dolphins *Tursiops truncates* and a single White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*.

After a short visit to Cartagena the ship sailed for the San Blas Islands in Panama before undertaking a transit of the canal. At sea I found a dead Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo*

Plate 70 **a.** Male Snowcap. **b.** Burrowing Parrots. **c.** Brown Booby and liner. **d.** Yellow-billed Cuckoo. **e.** Lesser Yellowlegs, Cayman Brac. **f.** Magnificent Frigatebirds. **g.** Turkey Vulture.





olivaceous, successfully released a boxed Bobolink and came across a very tired Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*. At the islands I was driving a shuttle boat to and fro and noted hundreds of Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica*, Cliff Swallows *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* and Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* on visible migration. In the evening, on one lifeboat there was a Purple Martin *Progne subis* and on another was a male Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus*.

Going through the Panama Canal is always a highlight, not only to marvel at this engineering wonder but also for the wildlife, and besides four American Crocodiles *Crocodylus acutus*, nearly 40 species of birds were seen. The commonest of the migrants was Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*, with over 5,000 noted, plus some 2-3,000 Broad-winged Hawks *Buteo platypterus*, 30+ Swainson's Hawks *Buteo swainsoni* and three Peregrines, together with thousands of swallows and martins and about 30 Chimney Swifts *Chaetura peligra*. There was a surprise for me on Gatun Lake - an immature Brown Booby flying low and fast towards Gatun Locks and the Caribbean.

In all the transit took eight and a half hours and the ship then headed westwards towards Costa Rica. There were few seabirds but a large jumping billfish of some kind got the pulse racing. Cetaceans were plentiful, with unidentified dolphins, Humpback Whales *Megaptera novaeangliae*, six Pantropical Spotted Dolphins *Stenella attenuata* and two Bryde's Whales *Balaenoptera edeni*. The 18th found us approaching Costa Rica and the day was especially notable as I saw an unexpected and out-of-range Black-vented Shearwater *Puffinus opisthomelas*. It was beside the starboard bow and slowly drifted away ahead of the ship, giving fantastic views. Two large flocks of Black Terns *Chlidonias niger*, totalling about 500 individuals caused excitement, as did two adult Sabine's Gulls *Xema sabini*, one very close and the other distant.

From Costa Rica the ship headed across the Panama Basin to Ecuador. This day-and-a-half was very productive for wildlife, with a mixture of both birds and cetaceans. Boobies became more numerous and amongst the commoner Brown and Red-footed *Sula sula* there were the first Nazca Boobies *S. granti*, one of which spent some time on the foremast. The first Pink-footed Shearwaters *Ardenna creatopus* also made an appearance and on the afternoon of the 20th there was a very close Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* and a single Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus*. There were other birds as well, such as Band-rumped Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* and *S. longicaudus*, Grey/Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus/fulicarius*, Magnificent Frigatebird and an unidentified *Pterodroma* petrel. Meanwhile, dolphins abounded.

Visits to Isla de la Plata, Ecuador are always frustrating for me, knowing that Waved Albatross *Phoebastria irrorata* breed there but in an area closed off by the national park authorities. However, extremely close frigatebirds and displaying Blue-footed Boobies *Sula nebouxii* made up for it, not to mention Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* just off the beach, two Peregrines, Long-tailed Mockingbirds *Mimus longicaudatus*, Collared Warbling Finches *Poospiza hispaniolensis* and one of the smallest hummingbirds of all, Short-tailed Woodstar *Myrmia micrura*.

Plate 71 **a.** Turkey Vultures, Panama Canal. **b.** Nazca Booby. **c.** Blue-footed Boobies. **d.** Peruvian Pelicans. **e.** Long-tailed Mockingbird. **f.** Red-legged Cormorant. **g.** Sooty Shearwaters.

Next on the sea agenda was the excitement of the Humboldt Current, for we were now off northern Peru. I soon saw my first Waved Albatross - from the breakfast table! I always ensured that at breakfast and lunch I was close to a window. Peruvian Pelicans *Pelecanus thagus* and Peruvian Boobies *Sula variegata* joined the list, as did Markham's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates markhami*, White-chinned *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, Westland *P. westlandica* and Juan Fernandez *Pterodroma externa* petrels, Guanay Cormorant *Leucocarbo bougainvillii*, Inca Tern *Larosterna inca* and Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*. There were also Humpback Whales (breaching) and Short-beaked Common Dolphins *Delphinus delphis*. The biggest surprise of all though came at 11:38 hrs on 23 October, when a Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* went across the bow right in front of the ship. Neither of my two Peruvian field guides lists it and another book shows it only in southernmost Chile. Could this be the first record for Peru?

The islands off the coast of southern Peru and northern Chile used to be exploited for their seabird guano. Only small-scale operations are undertaken now but the birds are still there, in their tens of thousands - mostly boobies, cormorants and Peruvian Pelican. Our time at Peru's Isla Lobos de Tierra and Isla Lobos de Afuera was particularly rewarding, with hundreds of Short-beaked Common Dolphins and more than a dozen Humpback Whales, (including at least one calf); some were breaching too. In addition to the abundant boobies and cormorants I was very pleased to note Inca Tern, Humboldt Penguin *Spheniscus humboldti*, the very attractive Red-legged Cormorant *Phalacrocorax gaimardi*, Band-tailed Gull *Larus belcheri*, Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* and Sabine's Gull. One of the most astonishing things that I have ever seen a whale do happened at the Peruvian islands. Having already had extraordinary views of two Blue Whales *Balaenoptera musculus*, there were cries of delight and astonishment when one of them swam straight for the side of the ship, dived underneath us and surfaced on the other side!

Time along the seafront at Paracas in southern Peru was rewarded with close views of various shorebirds, including a Sanderling *Calidris alba* and a Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, each of which had both a metal ring and a readable plastic leg flag. A report was made to the organising scheme in the USA and although no response was forthcoming, I assumed that the birds had been marked in Alaska. A visiting Peregrine caused panic among the birds and in the same area there were groups of Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis* (100+) and Black Skimmer *Rhynchos niger* (7-8,000). Out at sea, Shy/Salvin's albatrosses *Thalassarche salvini* made their appearance, along with Peruvian Diving-Petrel *Pelecanoides garnotii*, Elliott's Storm-petrel *Oceanites gracilis*, a possible Stejneger's Petrel *Pterodroma longirostris* and Dusky Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus obscurus*.

The next port of call was Coquimbo, in Chile. There were lots of birds to be seen en route and the first one in my notebook, on the 30th, was Markham's Storm-petrel, of which I saw between 1,000 and 1,200. The next couple of days were very exciting, with more new species being seen. Among the best were Hornby's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma hornbyi*, Stejneger's Petrel, Masatierra Petrel *Pterodroma defilippiana*, a southbound passage of Sooty Shearwaters, Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea*

Plate 72 **a.** Inca Tern. **b.** Band-tailed Gull. **c.** Wilson's (Fuegian) Storm-petrel. **d.** Leg-tagged Sanderling. **e.** Blue Whale from under ship. **f.** Ashy-headed Geese. **g.** Magellanic Oystercatchers.



sanfordi, Chilean Seaside Cinclodes *Cinclodes nigrofumosus* and a possible Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita*. Once again though, it was an out-of-range shearwater (the third of the trip) that was the biggest surprise of all. At 14.25 on the 30th I was scanning through a flock of southbound Sooty Shearwaters when I locked onto something different - a solitary Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*. Very close views were had so there was no doubt about the bird's identity.

After several more shore excursions we were at sea again on 3 November, SSW of Valparaiso and things started off with 10–12 Buller's Albatrosses *Thalassarche bulleri* seen from the breakfast table. During the course of the day Fin Whales *Balaenoptera physalus*, two very close Sperm Whales *Physeter macrocephalus*, Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*, both Northern and Southern *Diomedea epomophora* Royal Albatross, Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys* and Buller's Shearwater *Puffinus bulleri* were added to my list of observations (which all go into the RNBWS database). Subsequent birds were many and varied and even included another out-of-range surprise - a Blackish Cinclodes *Cinclodes antarcticus* that landed on the ship. On the way to Valdivia the fourth and last 'surprising shearwater' was spotted - Christmas Shearwater *Puffinus nativitatis*, which the Chilean field guide says is "Not known close to Chilean mainland."

I was anxious to see Pincoya Storm-petrel *Oceanites pincoyae* and success came two-and-a-half hours after leaving Puerto Montt. In a 30-minute period at the northern end of Golfo de Ancud I counted 169 of them. The next notable sighting was another unexpected one, Green-backed Firecrown *Sephanoides sephanoides*, the most southerly of the hummingbirds. It was in the middle of a gulf, miles from land and in gale force winds. Excellent views were had as it zipped back and forth in front of the lounge windows up on deck nine.

Fuegian Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus chilensis*, the local form of Wilson's, may soon be split and in the appropriately named English Narrows I found three on deck, all released successfully. Southern seabirds were still appearing before me and they included familiar friends like both Giant-Petrels *Macronectes giganteus* and *M. halli*, Cape Petrel *Daption capense*, Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*, Magellanic Pelecanoides *magellani* and Common Diving-Petrel *P. urinatrix*, Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides* and Magellanic Penguin *Spheniscus magellanicus*. Ashore at Ainsworth Bay an interesting selection of Patagonian birds was on offer. It was good to be able to walk around and see Kelp and Dolphin Gulls *Larus dominicanus* and *Leucophaeus scoresbii*, South American Tern *Sterna hirundinacea*, Ashy-headed Goose *Chloephaga poliocephala*, Flying Steamer Duck *Tachyeres patachonicus*, Chimango Caracara *Milvago chimango*, nesting Magellanic Oystercatchers *Haematopus leucopodus*, Correndera Pipit *Anthus corendera*, Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni*, White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps* and Austral Negrito *Lessonia oreas*. One of the last species that I saw was the majestic Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* - two adults and an immature, circling over the Andes.

The last noteworthy sighting came just as the ship approached the pier at Punta Arenas, when *MV Silver Cloud* was briefly piloted by a small group of Peale's Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus australis*. It was a fitting end to an extraordinary voyage.

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Seabird reports for 2018

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN, Seabird Recorder

Following the change made last year (see *Sea Swallow* 67:71–73) there is less descriptive material this year. The data received has been entered into the online database and may be interrogated from there. One may search by observer's name, by species or by ship name.

We continue to list the observers, their voyages and their activity, plus any highlights of the year, but without the pages listing details of species, positions, observers and dates. As always, if you want to study a species or an area, please ask. The records can be extracted and the data set sent to you without any trouble.

Please continue sending your records to: data@rnbws.org.uk. Thank you.

Selected seabird highlights from the ornithological press

The following is a trawl through press and bird journals that feature seabird distribution news that have crossed my desk in 2018.

Focus on Mozambique

First, from Gary Alport (2018) are records of terns, gulls and skuas in southern Mozambique including the first country records of Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. Sightings in southern Mozambique of 13 species of terns, gulls and skuas are reported, the result of regular observations between October 2010 and September 2017 while he was based in Maputo. These include the first fully documented record of Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* and the first observations of live Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* for Mozambique, as well as status updates for Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*, Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*, Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Swift Tern *Thalasseus bergii*, Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Black-naped Tern *S. sumatrana*, Roseate Tern *S. dougallii* and Subantarctic Skua *Stercorarius antarcticus* in southern Mozambique.

Another first record for Mozambique, Cokera *et al.* 2018, was that of Hartlaub's Gull *Chroicocephalus hartlaubii* first reported on 26 December 2017 at c.14:00 hrs,

Table 1. In the year 2018, reports of seabirds at sea were received from the following observers.

David Ballance	MV <i>Boudicca</i> , Dover to ports in Spain, Portugal, the Canary Islands and Madeira, returning to Dover, in April. His next voyage was on board MV <i>Magellan</i> from Portbury to ports in the Netherlands, the Baltic and southern Ireland before returning to Portbury in September. Paper reports and detailed notes.
Keith Betton	MV <i>Plancius</i> Atlantic Odyssey voyage, March–April. Ushuaia, Drake Passage, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, Gough Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Gough Island, Ascension Island, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Gambia, Cape Verde. Observations supplied electronically by Hans Verdaat.
Stephen Chapman	MV <i>Mont St Michel</i> May–June. Portsmouth, Caen, Portsmouth. Excel files.
Simon Cook	MV <i>St Helena</i> January–February. Cape Town, St Helena, Cape Town. MV <i>Silver Cloud</i> March–April. Ushuaia, Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha, Gough Island, South Africa, Namibia, Angola, St Helena, Ascension Island, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Senegal, Western Sahara, Morocco, Lisbon. MV <i>Silver Discoverer</i> (all underway), June–August. Part 1: Cairns, Queensland - eastern tip of New Guinea - entire north coast of NG - around western tip - Darwin, NT. Part 2: Kimberley cruises - back and forth between Darwin and Broome with visits to Indonesia. MV <i>Silver Cloud</i> October–November. Nassau, Bahamas, Cuba, Cayman Brac, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Panama, Panama Canal, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Punta Arenas, Chile. On watch records on Excel files plus paper reports and notes for periods off watch.

at the Porto da Pesca in Maputo, (26S 32.6E), with a group of Grey-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus* of different ages one of which appeared slightly, but conspicuously, smaller. On closer examination it showed a uniformly dark bill, dark eye, and plain face with limited smudging on the head.

Seabird sightings off southern and central Mozambique (Rollinson 2018), were made by Dominic Rollinson while conducting research onboard a fishing vessel operating off southern and central Mozambique between 1 August and 17 October 2015. These observations include the first confirmed Mozambican records of Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*, Leach's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates leucorhous*, Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *H. monorhysis*, Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *H. matsudairae* and South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*. Details are also given for 25 other seabird species.

Cape Verde Islands

Extralimital boundaries are continually being pushed back. Another example off the other coast of Africa is the first record of Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* for the Cape Verde Islands at Raso, on 8–9 March 2017 when Ernst Albegger (Albegger, E, 2018) and colleagues recorded an adult during a one-week visit.

On the same coast a first record of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* was reported for Senegal (Moran *et al.* 2018). On 19 October 2016, a pelagic trip was organised during the 14th Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Dakar. The group set off north from Ngor, with the objective to travel out to the start of the continental shelf, c.15 nautical miles offshore, and attempt to locate a trawler. Approximately 45 minutes into the journey Barend van Gemerden noticed a long-winged, pale brown seabird approaching from the east and called 'shearwater'. At that point, they had not seen any *calonectris* shearwaters and the bird's slim-winged structure and rather lazy flight action on slightly 'pushed forward' wings, seemed to match that genus. The bird continued to approach as the boat slowed down, and the lack of contrast between brownish upper- and underparts, the slightly slower flight and, at close range, the bill structure, quickly

revealed that it was in fact a *sula* species. It made a few circuits of the boat and was photographed. The sighting was at c.15N 17.5W. This is a first for Senegal: the nearest nestings are on Ascension Island, and on the Brazilian archipelago of Fernando de Noronha. The species is occasional in the Cape Verde Islands, where it has been reported 11 times before July 2016; as of October 2016, at least 17 individuals were present in Raso.

Sussex booby

Staying with wandering boobies, a Red-footed Booby turned up in Sussex not 20 miles from my desk, found on the beach at St Leonards-on-Sea, on 4 September 2016. The bird was in poor condition and taken into care by the RSPCA, where it made a good recovery. It was flown to Grand Cayman in the Caribbean for release but died on 25 December 2016 while in quarantine there. This is the first record of Red-footed Booby for Britain. It has been added to Category A of the British List. A summary of recent occurrences in Europe and the Western Palearctic suggests it is occurring more frequently, perhaps as a consequence of climate change and higher sea temperatures.

First record of Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* for Senegal

Another first for Senegal was noted on 29 April 2017, when Bram Piot and Miguel Lecocq visited îles de la Madeleine National Park, c.2 km off Dakar (14.7N 17.5W) in order to check the Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster* seen there on several occasions during the preceding months, on the rocky cliffs on one of the islands. About halfway during the crossing to the islands, they noticed a large, dark and long-tailed bird with long wings flying high above. After watching it through binoculars, it was clear that it was a frigatebird *Fregata* sp., a genus that had not been recorded in Senegal previously. The two attempted to obtain good views and photographs, as they were aware that specific identification of frigatebirds can be challenging.

Where Shetland Red-necked Phalaropes go in winter

Until recently, the migration route and wintering areas of Red-necked Phalaropes

Phalaropus lobatus breeding in Scotland were a matter of speculation, since no foreign ringing recoveries existed for this population. In 2013, a male fitted with a geolocator the previous year was retrapped on its breeding grounds in Shetland. Data from the tag revealed that the bird had followed a westerly migration route, crossing the Atlantic to North America and travelling south to winter in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of South America - the first recorded instance of a European breeding bird wintering in the Pacific (Smith M *et al.* 2018). From just one individual it could not be established whether this migration route was exceptional or representative of the wider Scottish population. This article reports the tracking of two further males that followed a closely similar route. The authors infer that the transatlantic migration and Pacific wintering grounds of Red-necked Phalaropes breeding in Shetland are more likely to be the rule than the exception, although tracking of females is required to clarify whether they follow a similar route.

Atlantic Puffin strays to Israel

The easternmost record of an Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica* is reported by Annette L Fayet and Paolo Becciu in *Seabird* 2018: 84–87. They report the finding on the Mediterranean coast of Israel in September 2018. Using morphometrics (quantitative analysis of form) and current knowledge of Puffin movements they infer that the bird is probably from the UK or Ireland. This record is over 800nm further east than the easternmost recovery of a British or Irish ringed Atlantic Puffin in the Mediterranean Sea to date.

Feedback

Seabirds continue to generate interest around the world, and with it a growing realisation that more species exist at sea than are documented. Remote island isolation of populations is a key to populations evolving as different species. Splitting of island populations is addressed in the just published seabird book, *Oceanic Birds of the World* by Steve Howell and Kirk Zufelt. Easy travel, cruise ship voyages and offshore small boat pelagic cruising are making what was the preserve of the deep-sea mariner more accessible. At-sea observations by research teams focused on specifics are

bringing a host of new information, as with Dominic Rollinson's observations off Mozambique. If I miss any you think should be here please let me know.

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Plate 73. Gouldian Finch. © S Cook

Landbirds from ships at sea

by Captain Stephen Chapman MN

This year's summary report is based on data for the year 2018 and again majors on Simon Cook's voyages while working as a lecturer/naturalist on board expedition cruise ships.

Please continue sending your records to: data@rnbws.org.uk Thank you. The following are a few highlights.

Table 1. In the year 2018, reports of landbirds at sea were received from the following observers.

David Ballance (DB) MV *Boudicca*, Dover to ports in Spain, Portugal, the Canary Islands and Madeira, returning to Dover, in April. The next voyage was on board MV *Magellan* from Portbury to ports in the Netherlands, the Baltic and southern Ireland before returning to Portbury in September. Paper reports and detailed notes.

Simon Cook (SC) RMS *St Helena* January–February. Cape Town, St Helena, Cape Town. MV *Silver Cloud* March–April. Ushuaia, Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha, Gough Island, South Africa, Namibia, Angola, St Helena, Ascension Island, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Senegal, Western Sahara, Morocco, Lisbon. MV *Silver Discoverer*, June–August. Cairns, Queensland – eastern tip of New Guinea – entire north coast of NG – around western tip – Darwin, NT. Then a second voyage cruising from Kimberley cruises – back and forth between Darwin and Broome and visits to Indonesia. MV *Silver Cloud* October–November. Nassau, Bahamas, Cuba, Cayman Brac, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Panama, Panama Canal, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Punta Arenas, Chile. Extensive paper reports and notes.

European waters

DB reported two Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* on 18 April at 34.3N 11.6W plus a Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucus*, and a single dove off the Lizard at 49.2N 4.4W, on 27 April. On 26 April at sea off northern Morocco SC had a Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*, later six; and two Collared Doves aboard and a single Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* flying around the ship at 07:30 hrs at 34.4N 9.2W.

In St George's Channel at 51.6N 6.2W DB recorded two Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* on 21 September.

New Guinea and Australia

SC writes, although we made various landings along the north coast of New Guinea there were very slim pickings in terms of birds. One thing that does stand out was seeing a member of the Bird-of-Paradise family *paradisaeidae* from my Zodiac. This was the rather plain and dull Crinkle-collared Manucode *Manucodia chalybatus*; a good name for the notebook though!

Under Australia's cabotage rules we had to leave their waters on every Kimberley cruise. Whilst this was extremely annoying for the passengers, from my point of view it was great. Lots to look for and see on the way to and from Indonesian islands at the western end of New Guinea plus birding ashore too.

Some of the highlights from the crossings were: various species of sea snake, turtles, cetaceans and a lunar eclipse. The Kimberley highlights were Chestnut Rail *Eulabeornis castaneoventris* and Gouldian Finch *Erythrura gouldiae*¹. The rail was a long-awaited species and I saw several at Wyndham on the edge of the mangroves from both the ship and the dock. The finches were also at Wyndham, at the caravan park. When I were a lad I had an aviary and had a pair of Gouldians but had never seen them in the wild on previous trips to Oz.

Three years ago I saw three drab, yellowy/grey/green immatures at the caravan park but never saw the adults. Last year, on two visits during time off, I saw nearly 200. so, after a wait of nearly 45 years I finally saw adults in the wild.

27 June during the 06:30–07:30 hrs watch (mid-posn 4.6S, 145.1E, 5½' from land): one Eastern Reef Egret *Egretta sacra* flying around the ship at 06:54 hrs; one Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae* going east at 07:15 hrs - huge bird; three Pacific Swallows *Hirundo tahitica* and a Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* flying around the ship at 07:24 hrs.

8 July a Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus regina* on deck and photographed about 03:00 hrs in the Arafura Sea, en route to Darwin.

20 July in enclosed waters during my 08:00–11:00 hrs watch a Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* flew across ahead.

Central and South America

Simon Cook's data cover the period from 3 October–10 November 2018 when on board MV *Silver Cloud*. The itinerary was Bahamas, Cuba, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Panama; through the Canal to Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru south to Punta Arenas, Chile. Once again, this itinerary was picked because of its coincidence with the migration between the Nearctic and the Neotropical regions (see *Sea Swallow* 67: 74–79). Although not as numerous as in previous years, there was still a good variety of birds to be seen on the ship. These are detailed in his article on pages 68–74.

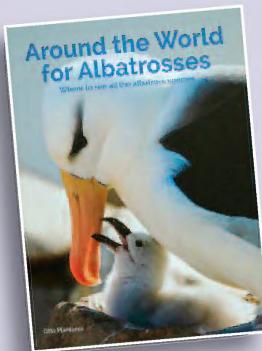
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¹ The Gouldian Finch was described by British ornithological artist John Gould in 1844 as *Amadina gouldiae*, in honour of his deceased wife Elizabeth, Ed.

Book Review

Around the World for Albatrosses: Where to see all the albatross species by Otto Plantema. Published by Otto Plantema 2019. Hardback 148 pp, 220 photographs full colour. €19.50 + postage, via the author otto.plantema@planet.nl. (Part of the proceeds from this book will be granted to the Albatross Task Force sponsored by RSPB and Birdlife). In the UK, the book can be ordered via the internet with at least three British booksellers.



The author's motivation is "to show every aspect of the beauty of the albatross" and "sharing travel information and encouraging people to go and see these birds in their spectacular environment". His passion for albatrosses began with a visit to the Black-browed Albatross colony on New Island, Falklands in 1978 and since then he has managed to visit almost

all of the major albatross breeding sites in the world and photograph all but one species - a remarkable and dedicated effort.

The Introduction to the book includes a brief note on albatross taxonomy with 21 species recognised after Nunn *et al.* (1996), also notes on breeding, photography and the very real threats to the on-going survival of these magnificent birds.

Starting at the Falklands, going eastwards around the world and ending in the North Pacific most of the accessible major breeding colonies are described and detailed travel advice to these mostly remote locations is given. Albatross species are discussed in the order in which they occur geographically starting with Black-browed and ending with Waved. For each species there are brief notes on identification, distribution, population, breeding and threats. The book contains a superb portfolio of images of all species, most taken at their breeding colonies by the author (Amsterdam Albatross images supplied by R Bigonneau). Print quality and colour reproduction are excellent. The book is not a treatise on albatrosses. Identification notes are brief, in some instances almost cryptic and photographs are not comprehensive with regard to age and plumage variation.

Travel advice focuses mainly on expensive expedition voyages. In the Australian segment only the Tasmanian 'day trip' pelagic is mentioned. There are day pelagic trips out of NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia on a monthly or twice monthly schedule. In South Australia four albatross species are almost certain, sometimes six or more. These trips are the most economical method for a land based observer to see albatrosses.

Captions are correct except for page 125 "Campbell Albatrosses" where the small top right hand image is an adult Salvin's. There are a few minor errors - Midway Island is at the north western end of the chain of volcanic islands forming the Hawaiian archipelago not west south west from Honolulu. In the description of Northern Royal Albatross the typo "southern" suggests incorrectly that the Northern Royal does not have a black cutting edge on the upper mandible. The Bounty Islands off SE New Zealand were discovered by the often unfairly maligned Capt. William Bligh RN not "Blight", though some of the 'Bounty' crew and later on the NSW 'Rum' Corps may have opted for the latter.

This book will be enjoyed by all those who are interested in and admire albatrosses.

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Plate 74. Northern Parula on board MV *Silver Cloud* at 0500 on 7 October 2018, 50 nm E. of Havana Cuba. © S Cook